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# PELOUBET'S NOTES 1980-1981

*Based on the International Bible  
Lessons for Christian Living  
Uniform Series*

by  
Ralph Earle

107th ANNUAL VOLUME  
Founded by Francis N. Peloubet

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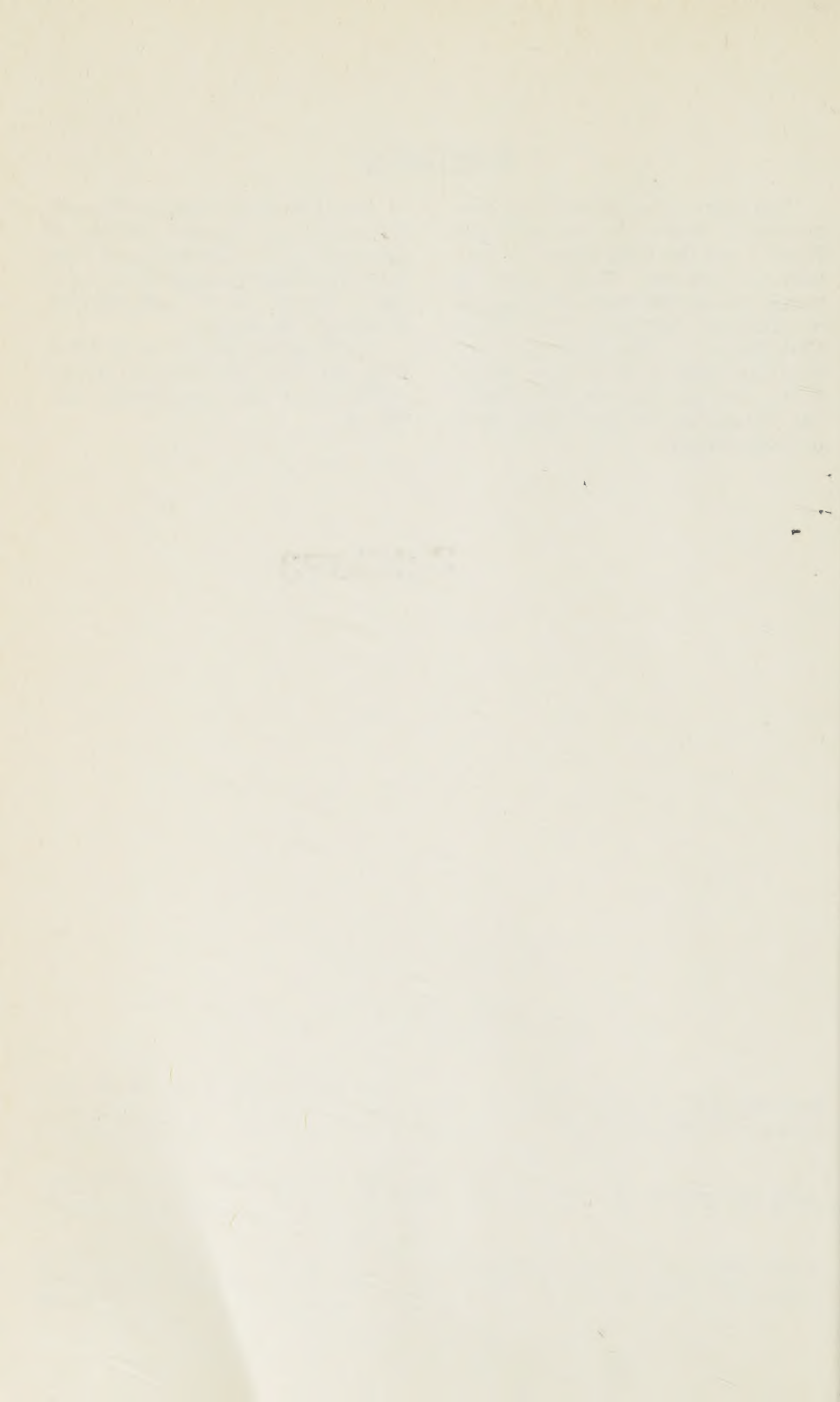
## PREFACE

The heart of the Old and New Testaments is "God's Covenant with His People," and this topic covers the first thirteen sessions. Then comes a twenty-one-session study of the Gospel of Matthew, beginning just before Christmas and ending on Easter. The important Book of Hebrews is treated in the next five sessions. And finally, the last quarter is devoted to the Book of Deuteronomy.

More lessons are taken from the Old Testament than in past editions of *Peloubet's Notes*. This will prove valuable, since the new covenant is rooted in the old. A look at the roots will help us to understand the shoots.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (1978) unless they are marked otherwise.

2093373



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# **GOD'S COVENANT WITH HIS PEOPLE**

**Unit I:** The Old Covenant in Its Early Stages

**Unit II:** The Old Covenant in Its Later Stages

**Unit III:** The New Covenant in Jesus Christ



September 7, 1980

# GOD: THE COVENANT MAKER

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Psalm 8

**Adult Topic:** *God: The Covenant Maker*

**Youth Topic:** *God: The Covenant Maker*

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Background Scripture:** Genesis 6-9

**Scripture Lesson:** Genesis 9:8-17

**Memory Verse:** *I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.*  
Genesis 9:15

**Topic:** *God's Promise to Noah*

**Background Scripture:** Genesis 9:1-17

CHILDREN

**Scripture Lesson:** Genesis 9:8-17

**Memory Verse:** *I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.*  
Genesis 9:15

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Sept. 1 M.:** Sin Grieves God. Gen. 6:5-13

**Sept. 2 T.:** God's Plan for Safety. Gen. 6:14-22

**Sept. 3 W.:** Safety in the Flood. Gen. 7:1-5, 17-23

**Sept. 4 T.:** Thanking God for Safety. Gen. 8:6-12, 20-22

**Sept. 5 F.:** Living with God's Blessing. Gen. 9:1-7

**Sept. 6 S.:** The Covenant of the Rainbow. Gen. 9:8-17

**Sept. 7 S.:** The Majesty of God. Ps. 8

LESSON AIM

To help us understand better, and appreciate more, God's covenant relationship with His people.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** uncertain

**Place:** northern part of Tigris—Euphrates Valley.

**God: The Covenant Maker**

**I. The Cause of the Flood:** Genesis 6:1-8

**II. Making the Ark:** Genesis 6:9-22

**III. The Flood:** Genesis 7:1-24

**IV. The End of the Flood:** Genesis 8:1-14

**V. Coming Out of the Ark:** Genesis 8:15-27

**VI. God's Instructions to Noah:** Genesis 9:1-7

A. Be Fruitful: v. 1

B. A New Diet: vv. 2-3

LESSON OUTLINE

- C. Prohibition Against Blood: vv. 4-6  
 D. Repeated Admonition: v. 7

- VII. God's Covenant with Noah:** Genesis 9:8-17  
 A. With Noah and His Descendants: vv. 8-9  
 B. With Every Living Creature: v. 10  
 C. No More Flood: v. 11  
 D. The Sign of the Covenant: vv. 12-13  
 E. A Constant Reminder: vv. 14-16  
 F. Repeated Emphasis: v. 17

**SUGGESTED  
 INTRODUCTION  
 FOR ADULTS**

The curriculum committee of the International Sunday School Lessons Series gives the following general introduction for this quarter's lessons: "The covenant idea is a strong thread that runs throughout the fabric of the Bible. It enriches the texture and holds the pattern together. The covenant may appear in different forms, but these differences are complementary. God elected to make a gracious commitment to his people through various individuals in different periods of history. Each generation needed to interpret the concept of God's election and covenant in terms meaningful for its day. With a new covenant in Jesus Christ, God calls and works through repentant believers and makes a covenant with them. They are now the new Israel.

"These course outlines are chronological, progressing from the origins of the covenant in Genesis to the fulfillment of the covenant theme in the New Jerusalem. The sessions will become most meaningful if they are developed with an emphasis on distinctive biblical personalities in their own historical backgrounds."

This quarter we will be studying "God's Covenant with His People." A covenant is a binding agreement between two persons or parties. In other words, it is a compact or contract.

**SUGGESTED  
 INTRODUCTION  
 FOR YOUTH**

Today we hear of bilateral and unilateral agreements. God's covenants with His people are unilateral; He writes the terms of the contracts.

This quarter of lessons is divided into three units: I. The Old Covenant in Its Early Stages; II. The Old Covenant in Its Later Stages; III. The New Covenant in Jesus Christ. We begin with God's covenant with Noah.

**CONCEPTS FOR  
 CHILDREN**

1. A covenant is an agreement made between two or more persons.
2. It is a promise to do certain things.
3. God's covenant is based on His love.
4. We are to accept His covenant and obey its conditions.

---

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

**I. THE CAUSE OF THE FLOOD:**  
 Genesis 6:1-8

In verse 1 we read that people were

getting numerous on the earth. "The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose." This verse has



often been taken as meaning that supernatural beings (angels?) married human women. But this is a very fanciful interpretation. We are distinctly told that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30). The "sons of God" are evidently the descendants of the line of Seth (Gen. 5), in distinction from the "daughters of men," who would be the descendants of Cain (4:17-24). That is, the godly line intermarried with the ungodly line.

This unfortunate intermarriage, based on lust rather than true love, had dire consequences. The Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years" (v. 3). This is sometimes interpreted as meaning that the average length of life would be cut down to 120 years in contrast to the amazing figures of chapter 5. But Adam Clarke is more likely correct when he comments: "Even at this time the earth was ripe for destruction, but God promised them 120 years' respite: if they repented in that interim, well; if not, they should be destroyed by a flood" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 27).

Verse 4 reads: "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown." Who were the Nephilim?

This is a Hebrew word, which comes from *naphal*, "he fell." That is, they were the fallen ones, apostates from the worship of the true God. Unfortunately the Septuagint translated *nephilim* as *gigantes*, which literally means "earth-born." But the King James translators took it in the sense of "gigantic," and mistranslated it "giants" (confusing it with Latin *gigas*).

The Hebrew word for "heroes" (KJV, "mighty men") is *gibborim*, which suggests "conquerors" or "victors." They were probably outstanding warriors.

Verse 5 is one of the saddest statements in the Bible: "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination

of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." No wonder that we read that God was "grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain" (v. 6). So He declared that He would destroy mankind, as well as the animals (v. 7). "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (v. 8). He was the one man who kept true to God.

## II. MAKING THE ARK: Genesis 6:9-22

In contrast to the almost universal wickedness of men, we read that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (v. 9). What a miracle!

We also are told that Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth, (v. 10). The godly line continued through Shem—the Semitic people.

The Lord told Noah that He was going to destroy the earth's wicked population (v. 13). Noah was to build an ark of wood "450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high" (v. 15), with "lower, middle and upper decks" (v. 16) for a flood was coming (v. 17).

God then graciously promised Noah: "But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you" (v. 18). Noah's entire family of eight persons would be saved.

The ark was also to house two—a male and a female—of each species of living creatures (v. 19). Thus the animal kingdom would be perpetuated. Noah was to lay in a large supply of food to take care of this situation (v. 21). Appropriately, "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" (v. 22). It was his faithful obedience that saved Noah and his family.

Here we have an important lesson: One person's obedience to God can change a crisis situation. Let us not fail in our duty!

## III. THE FLOOD: Genesis 7:1-24

Now that everything was ready, the Lord told Noah to go into the ark, with

all his family "because I have found you righteous in this generation" (v. 1). He was to take with him "seven of every kind of clean animal" (v. 2). This probably means "seven pairs" of each, since it is added: "a male and its mate." The reason for the large number of clean animals, as well as birds (v. 3), was that many of them would be needed for sacrifice (see 8:20).

Then the Lord set a timetable: "Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights" (v. 4). It would take the week between sabbaths (cf. 2:3) to get all the animals into the ark. Characteristically we read again: "And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him" (v. 5). Obedience is the hallmark of God's true people.

"Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came to the earth" (v. 6). Long life was a factor in populating the earth in early days.

Sure enough, "after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth" (v. 10). The exact day is noted, and then we read this vivid description: "On that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights" (vv. 11-12).

The floodwaters covered even the high mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet (vv. 19-20). All men and animals were destroyed except those in the ark (vv. 21-23). "The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days" (v. 24).

#### IV. THE END OF THE FLOOD:

Genesis 8:1-14

"But God remembered Noah," and those with him in the ark, "and he sent a wind over the earth and the waters receded" (v. 1). After five months (v. 4; cf. 7:11), "the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat." The exact location is uncertain.

Noah finally released a raven (vv. 6, 7). It did not return, but fed itself on the dead bodies that were scattered everywhere. Then he sent out a dove (v. 8). This clean bird came back (v. 9).

When he released it again seven days later, it returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf (v. 11). Then Noah knew that the water had receded. Seven days later the dove stayed out (v. 12). Noah uncovered the ark on the first day of the first month of his six hundred and first year (v. 13). "By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry" (v. 14). They had been in the ark a year and ten days (cf. 7:11).

#### V. COMING OUT OF THE ARK:

Genesis 8:15-27

God had told Noah to go into the ark (7:1), and now He told him to come out (v. 15). Noah obeyed (v. 18).

Appropriately, the first thing Noah did when he got out of the ark was to build an altar to the Lord and sacrifice burnt offerings on it (v. 20). God was pleased with this and vowed never again to curse the ground or destroy all living creatures (v. 21). As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease (v. 22).

#### VI. GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS TO NOAH:

Genesis 9:1-7

##### A. Be Fruitful: v. 1

The command given to Noah and his sons here is essentially the same as that given to Adam and Eve in 1:28. The human race was to make a new beginning.

##### B. A New Diet: vv. 2-3

Verse 2 is also similar to the rest of 1:28. But verse 3 introduces a new item. In 1:29 we read that man was to eat fruit, grain, and vegetables. But after the flood men were given the flesh of animals to eat; no longer would they have to be vegetarians.

##### C. Prohibition Against Blood: vv. 4-6

There was one restriction in the use of meat: they were not to eat it with blood in it, for the blood is the life of the

animal. In connection with this there is a solemn warning against murder. It is all right to kill animals, but not a human being, because the latter is made in the image of God (v. 6).

#### D. Repeated Admonition: v. 7

The command given in verse 1 is repeated here. It was especially important, since the earth was now empty of human beings. Today, in our population explosion, this command is not exactly relevant!

### VII. GOD'S COVENANT WITH

#### NOAH:

#### Genesis 9:8-17

#### A. With Noah and His Descendants: vv. 8-9

Near the beginning of our lesson for today God said to Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter the ark" (6:18). After Noah came out of the ark more than a year later, the Lord said to him and his sons, "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you." It was not a temporary covenant, but a permanent one.

What is a covenant? It is an agreement between two parties, a compact or contract. The Hebrew word is *berith*. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) it is rendered as *diatheke* 270 times. The translators did not use *sytheke*, which means a covenant between equals, with both parties setting conditions. Rather, they used *diatheke*, which signifies a unilateral agreement. In Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Johannes Behm says of *diatheke*: "This is a treaty between two parties, but binding only on the one according to the terms fixed by the other" (*TDNT*, II, 125). In the Bible God is the one who sets the terms of the treaty, and those terms are binding on His people.

The word *diatheke* occurs thirty-three times in the New Testament, over half of those (seventeen times) in the Epistle to the Hebrews. So the idea of

covenant is a prominent phase of both Old and New Testament theology. It deserves the attention given to it in a whole quarter of Bible study lessons.

#### B. With Every Living Creature: v. 10

The Lord told Noah that His covenant was established with every living creature on earth—"the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you." As Creator, God is interested in His creation.

#### C. No More Flood: v.11

What was God's covenant with Noah, his descendants, and all living creatures? Now we are told: "Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." There have been many disastrous and destructive floods—especially in the twentieth century—but not one of them has threatened the population of the whole world. And none ever will, for God has given His word.

#### D. The Sign of the Covenant: vv. 12-13

What was the sign of the divine covenant, "a covenant for all genera-

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What caused Noah to be true to God in the midst of universal wickedness?
2. Why should Christians marry Christians?
3. What are some parallels between our times and the description of Noah's day?
4. How did the ark compare with larger ships today? (It had about 43,000 tons displacement compared with 83,000 tons for the first Queen Elizabeth.)
5. How is the importance of worship illustrated here?
6. What should the rainbow say to us today?



tions to come"? (v. 12). The Lord said: "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (v. 13).

Genesis 2:5 says that when God made the earth and the heavens "no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up: the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth." Some have seized hold of the last statement and asserted that there was no rain or rainbow until the flood. But that assumption ignores the previous statements that no shrubs or plants of the field had yet appeared on the earth. Surely this condition was not true up to the time of Noah.

Adam Clarke is probably correct when he writes: "From the well-known cause of this phenomenon it cannot be rationally supposed that there was no rainbow in the heavens before the time mentioned in the text, for as the rainbow is the natural effect of the sun's rays falling on drops of water, and of their being refracted and reflected by them, it must have appeared at different times from the creation of the sun and the atmosphere. Nor does the text intimate that the bow was now created for a sign to Noah and his posterity; but that what was formerly created, or rather that which was the necessary effect in certain cases of the creation of the sun and atmosphere, should now be considered by them as an unailing token of their continual preservation

from the waters of a deluge; therefore the text speaks of what had already been done, and not what was now done, 'My bow I have given, or put in the cloud'" (*Commentary*, p. 31).

#### E. A Constant Reminder: vv. 14-16

"Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." Should not the rainbow also be to us a reminder of God's faithfulness in keeping His promises? Every sight of it should thrill us with fresh hope!

When John had his vision of God's throne in heaven, he saw a rainbow encircling the throne (Rev. 4:3). It is the eternal promise that God will keep His "everlasting covenant." What consolation it should bring to us all!

#### F. Repeated Emphasis: v. 17

Again God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth." God's promises are sure! He will never break His covenant. We can rest quietly in that assurance.

---

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

One cannot help wondering how much longer God will put up with the prevailing wickedness of our day. The shamelessness with which pornography is displayed on television and at newsstands is unbelievable. And men are behaving in more perverse ways than one could imagine. Can God let this go unpunished much longer?

God will not send a second flood like

the first. We have His word for that. But Peter sounds a note of warning for us today. He says that the world was once deluged and destroyed, but now is "reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (II Peter 3:6-7). We need to be sure that we are in the Ark—Christ our Savior.



September 14, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND ABRAHAM

DEVOTIONAL READING	Romans 10:5-13
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>God's Covenant and Abraham</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Following God's Call</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Genesis 12:1-9; 17:1-21</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Genesis 12:1-4a; 17:1-8</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.</i> Genesis 17:7</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>God's Promise to Abraham</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Genesis 12:1-7</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Genesis 12:1-7</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.</i> Genesis 12:7</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>Sept. 8 M.: Going Out in Faith. Gen. 12:1-9</p> <p>Sept. 9 T.: Fear Causes Failure. Gen. 12:10-20</p> <p>Sept. 10 W.: A Parting and a Promise. Gen. 13:1-16</p> <p>Sept. 11 T.: Counted Righteous. Gen. 15:1-6</p> <p>Sept. 12 F.: Father of Many Nations. Gen. 17:1-8</p> <p>Sept. 13 S.: Promise of a Son. Gen. 17:9-21</p> <p>Sept. 14 S.: Righteousness Based on Faith. Rom. 10:5-13</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us appreciate God's covenant with man and to help us realize the supreme importance of obedience.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> about 2000 B.C.</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Haran and the land of Canaan</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>God's Covenant and Abraham</b></p> <p><b>I. The Call of Abram:</b> Genesis 12:1-3</p> <p>A. Leave Your Country: v. 1</p> <p>B. A Great Nation: v. 2</p> <p>C. A Blessing to All the World: v. 3</p> <p><b>II. The Obedience of Abram:</b> Genesis 12:4-5</p> <p>A. Leaving Haran: v. 4</p> <p>B. Arriving in Canaan: v. 5</p>

**III. Abram in Canaan: Genesis 12:6-9**

- A. At Shechem: vv. 6-7
- B. At Bethel: v. 8
- C. Traveling South: v. 9

**IV. God's Covenant with Abraham: Genesis 17: 1-8**

- A. At Ninety-nine Years of Age: v. 1
- B. Increase in Numbers: v. 2
- C. The Father of Many Nations: vv. 3-4
- D. A New Name: v. 5
- E. Very Fruitful: v. 6
- F. An Everlasting Covenant: v. 7
- G. The Promised Land: v. 8

**V. The Covenant of Circumcision: Genesis 17:9-14****VI. The Promise of Isaac: Genesis 17:15-21**

If one were to ask, "Who is the most important single character in the Old Testament?" probably there would be general agreement that the correct answer is "Abraham." Only eleven chapters of the Bible precede the call of Abram. Then he, his sons, and his grandsons dominate the rest of the Book of Genesis. And all the rest of the Old Testament deals with his descendants.

When we come to the New Testament we find in the very first verse that Jesus Christ is "the son of Abraham." And the name Abraham occurs no less than seventy-three times in the New Testament. As the father of God's chosen people he holds a unique place in human history.

We begin our lesson today with God's call to Abraham and Abraham's obedience to that call. Abraham is cited in the New Testament as a great example of faith. And that faith was demonstrated in obedience.

The greatest experience that can come to any person in life is a call from God. Without Him life isn't worth living. The first divine call is the call to repentance and receiving Jesus Christ as Savior. This is the absolutely essential one.

Many young people are honored by God's call to special service for Him. We should be very grateful for such a call and should respond immediately with obedience.

But every Christian has the call to serve. As "laymen," employed in secular pursuits or occupations, we are still to serve the Lord all our lives as He directs. Let's be quick to answer God's call!

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. God had a great plan for Abraham's life.
2. God has an important plan for all of our lives.
3. We should find what God's will is for each of us.
4. Obedience to God's call is our first responsibility.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE CALL OF ABRAM:

Genesis 12:1-3

#### A. Leave Your Country: v. 1

In Acts 7:2-3 we read Stephen's statement: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'" But in Genesis the call is recorded, in the same words, after Abram had left Ur of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran (11:31)—the midpoint in the journey from Mesopotamia to Canaan. How are we going to reconcile the seeming contradiction?

The first thing we should note is that Genesis 12:1 says, "The LORD had said to Abram" (KJV, NIV), which implies that the call had been given to him at a previous time.

Some scholars, however, question whether the Hebrew fully supports the "had" (cf. NASB, "the LORD said"). So we would suggest that the call was first given to Abram in Ur of the Chaldeans (Mesopotamia—modern Iraq) and was then renewed to him in Haran.

This gives a very logical sequence. When the divine call came to Abram, he naturally told his father, whose authority over his grown children was greater than in our culture. With all good intentions, Terah "took his son Abram... and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there" (11:31).

This involved a twofold lack of full obedience on Abram's part. He did leave his country, but he did not leave his father's household, as he had been commanded to do. In the second place, he stopped short of his divinely assigned destination. The family set out "to go to Canaan," but they only went halfway.

That is why the call was renewed in Haran. And this time an added emphasis was given: he was to leave his "father's household" (12:1; cf. Acts 7:3).

And God told him to go all the way to Canaan, "the land I will show you." Had he not done so, God could not have fulfilled His promises to him. And that is true in our cases also.

#### B. A Great Nation: v. 2

Abram had to leave his own country and relatives if he was going to become "a great nation." Because he obeyed, he did become exactly that. One marvels at what large results can come from such small beginnings. One man and his wife become a great nation? It took centuries, of course, but it finally happened.

God added a second promise: "And I will bless you." This takes in a lot of territory! The greatest benefit that can come to any person is to have God's blessing on his or her life. When we obey the Lord we can claim this promise. When we disobey, we cannot.

The third promise was: "I will make your name great." We have already noted how literally and abundantly this was fulfilled as is evidenced by the eminent place that Abraham holds in both the Old and New Testaments. Not only is Abraham honored greatly in Judaism and Christianity, but he is also held in high esteem in Islam.

There is a fourth promise: "And you will be a blessing." This is actually something greater than being blessed. But we cannot be a blessing to others until we have first been blessed by God. His blessings come *to us*, and then *through us*. So we must take time to let God bless us if we are going to be a blessing to others. There is no other way.

#### C. A Blessing to All the World: v.

3

The first part of this verse should be a warning to all who curse the Jews, God's chosen people descended from Abraham. It is interesting to note how Balaam, under prophetic inspiration,

picked this up and applied it to the nation of Israel (Num. 24:9).

In the last part of verse 3 we find a very sweeping promise:

and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.

How could this be? There is only one answer: "the son of Abraham." Through Jesus Christ, Abraham's descendant, all the peoples of earth have been blessed, are still being blessed, and will be blessed forever.

## II. THE OBEDIENCE OF ABRAM: Genesis 12:4-5

### A. Leaving Haran: v. 4

"So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him." Was he still failing to leave his father's household?

One has to assess this question in the light of later history. Lot's two sons, by incest with his two daughters, were Moab and Ammon (19:30-38). Their descendants, the Moabites and Ammonites, caused considerable trouble for the Israelites. Would this have been avoided if Abram had not taken Lot along with him? Perhaps so.

"Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran." He got a late start but not too late for all of God's promises to be fulfilled.

### B. Arriving in Canaan: v. 5

Abram "took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran." The last would be the large number of servants (for indoors and outdoors) that he had taken on as his flocks and herds increased. Together "they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there." At last Abram was where God wanted him.

## III. ABRAM IN CANAAN: Genesis 12:6-9

### A. At Shechem: vv. 6-7

"Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of

Moreh at Shechem" (not "plain of Moreh" as in the King James Version.) Shechem was an important place near the modern city of Nablus, at the foot of Mount Gerizim, in central Palestine. Today the Samaritans celebrate their passover on top of Mount Gerizim.

"The Canaanites were then in the land." This statement has been taken by negative critics as indicating a late date for the writing of the Pentateuch. But the land was inhabited by Canaanites in the time of Moses, and there is no reason why he should not point out that they were also there in Abraham's day.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land" (v. 7). So Abram built an altar to the Lord at Shechem, and thus made it a sacred place. It was especially sacred because there the Lord had "appeared to him" (we are not told in what way).

### B. At Bethel: v. 8

Abram continued a little farther south until he came to Bethel, which was about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. Here he pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai. These two places are mentioned together frequently in Joshua (7:2; 8:9, 12, 17; 12:9).

It is in the story of Jacob's life that Bethel becomes famous. Jacob was fleeing from the anger of his brother Esau, whom he had cheated. Stopping for the night, he had a dream in which he saw a stairway stretching to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending on it. When he wakened he exclaimed, "This is none other than the house of God" (28:17). So he called it "Bethel"—*beth*, "house," and *El*, "God." The account adds: "though the city used to be called Luz" (28:19). It is thought that the city was Luz and that Bethel was a holy place near it. In any case, Moses refers to it in our verse here as "Bethel," since that was its familiar name in his day.

At Bethel, as at Shechem, Abram "built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD." Abram was a devout man who worshiped the Lord everywhere he went.



### C. Traveling South: v. 9

"Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev." This is the Hebrew word for "south." Today the southern part of Palestine is regularly called "the Negev," so that those who read the news or listen to it on radio or television are familiar with the term.

The Negev is south of Jerusalem and Hebron. It was all desert around Beersheba, but now some of it has been transformed into fruitful gardens and productive farmland.

Abram was exploring the land that God had promised to him (v. 7), a perfectly natural thing to do. So he went from the extreme north, on the way down from Haran, to the extreme south, on the border of Egypt.

## IV. GOD'S COVENANT WITH

### ABRAHAM:

Genesis 17:1-8

#### A. At Ninety-nine Years of Age: v.

1

Abram was seventy-five years old when he entered Canaan for the first time (12:4-5). That sounds like an old man to us today. But now he is ninety-nine, and his best days are yet ahead!

Again the Lord appeared to him and spoke to him. This time He said: "I am God Almighty" (Hebrew *El-Shaddai*). This is the first of forty-eight times that *Shaddai* occurs in the Old Testament, and it is always translated "Almighty." It is found five more times in Genesis (28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25), once in Exodus (6:3), twice in Numbers (24:4, 16) and twice in Ruth (1:20, 21). Interestingly it occurs most frequently in Job (thirty-one times), but only twice in the Psalms (68:14; 91:1), once in Isaiah (13:6), twice in Ezekiel (1:24; 10:5), and once in Joel (1:15). It is a very significant name for the omnipotent One. The Greek equivalent in the New Testament is *pantokrator*, "all-powerful" (II Cor. 6:18 and eight times in Revelation).

The Lord said to Abram, "Walk before me and be blameless," or "perfect" (KJV). The New American Standard

Bible and New International Version translation is based partly on the Septuagint, which has *amemptos*, "blameless."

#### B. Increase in Numbers: v. 2

"I will confirm my covenant between me and you, and will greatly increase your numbers." We have already noted how strikingly this has been fulfilled in the case of Abraham. One thinks of the millions of Jews in the world today, to say nothing of the numberless millions of Abraham's descendants across nearly four thousand years. How much potential is wrapped up in one man! All that is needed is to release that potential into the hands of the all-powerful God!

#### C. The Father of Many Nations:

vv. 3-4

"Abram fell facedown" (v. 3). The reason for this translation (NIV) is that "fell on his face" (KJV, NASB) is used today mainly as a slang expression, carrying a very different connotation. The Committee on Bible Translation, responsible for producing the New International Version, gave very careful attention to the problem of what certain words or phrases might communicate to an audience today when the Bible is read from the pulpit.

Orientalers were in the habit of getting down on their knees and touching their foreheads to the ground. This is what Muslims still do when praying in their mosques.

Then God said to Abram: "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations" (v. 4). This, too, has been fulfilled. The Jews are not the only ones descended from Abraham, nor Israel the only nation. The many Arab nations count their descent from Abraham. His son Ishmael had twelve sons (25:13-14). Then there are the descendants of Esau, Jacob's older brother. The Jews, of course, are all descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.



### D. A New Name: v. 5

The Lord told His servant that he would no longer be called *Abram*, which means "exalted father," but *Abraham*, which means "father of many," "for I have made you a father of many nations."

The first statement of this verse is amply documented. We find the name *Abram* fifty-eight times in Genesis 11:26—17:5. But after this verse it occurs only twice more in the Old Testament (I Chron. 1:27; Neh. 9:7). On the other hand we find the name *Abraham* about 250 times in the rest of the Bible, beginning with this verse.

### E. Very Fruitful: v. 6

God promised Abraham: "I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you." Again we find abundant confirmation. Here we think of such kings as David and Solomon, but the greatest fulfillment of this promise is in Jesus Christ, the "King of kings," who will rule forever.

### F. An Everlasting Covenant: v. 7

We find this same expression in connection with God's covenant with Noah (9:16). God does not violate His covenants; they are as sure as His unchangeable nature.

The most important part of the covenant was that the Lord would be

Abraham's God and the God of his descendants after him. If He is our God, all other necessary blessings follow.

### G. The Promised Land: v. 8

The Lord also promised that "the whole land of Canaan," where Abraham was then residing as an alien, "I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." This confirmed the promise already given in 13:15.

## V. THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION: Genesis 17: 9-14

God had faithfully and generously stated His side of the covenant. But Abraham had his obligation, too. So the Lord said to him, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for generations to come" (v. 9).

The Lord then explained to him the covenant of circumcision—that is, the covenant of which the sign was circumcision. Every male was to be circumcised when eight days old, including servants born in the household or bought from outside (v. 12). This, too, was to be an everlasting covenant for Abraham's descendants, and so Jesus was circumcised as a Jewish boy. Any Jewish boy who was not circumcised would be cut off from his people for breaking God's covenant (v. 14).

Paul indicates clearly what circumcision means for us—"circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit" (Rom. 2:29). In Colossians 2:11 he writes concerning Christ: "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ." It is this spiritual circumcision that we all need today.

## VI. THE PROMISE OF ISAAC: Genesis 17:15-21

Not only was Abram's name changed but also that of his wife. *Sarai* became *Sarah*, which means "princess" (v. 15).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did God call Abram, not someone else?
2. Why do we have to "leave" in order to obtain?
3. What are some present applications of leaving country and kindred?
4. How may we have an "altar" wherever we are?
5. What is God's covenant with us?
6. What does circumcision mean for us?

The Lord then told Abraham: "I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her... she will be the mother of nations" (v. 16).

Poor Abraham! He was a hundred years old and his wife ninety. Furthermore, she had never been able to have a baby (16:1). Meanwhile, Abraham had had a son by Hagar, at Sarai's request (16:2). Naturally speaking, she had no hope at all.

So Abraham hid his face and "laughed" (v. 17). Then he said to the Lord, "If only Ishmael might live under

your blessing!" (v. 18). God's promises could be fulfilled through Ishmael's descendants!

But God had other plans: "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (v. 19). Ishmael would have many descendants, who would become a great nation (v. 20). But God's special covenant with Abraham would be fulfilled through Isaac and his descendants.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

In the summer of 1953 Mrs. Earle and I, with our party of thirty-five tourists to the Holy Land, were staying on the top of Mount Carmel, when we discovered that David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of the new state of Israel, was staying at the same hotel. Arrangements were made for an interview with him, which, to our surprise, lasted about an hour and a half. One of the first things he said to us was: "God

promised this land to Abraham and his descendants, and He has never abrogated that promise." Incidentally, Ben-Gurion was a devout student of the Bible, having Bible classes in his home.

The truth of Ben-Gurion's claim seems supported by the last part of our lesson. It was to Isaac's descendants, not Ishmael's, that the land was promised forever.

September 21, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND MOSES

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Jeremiah 17:7-13

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and Moses*

**Youth Topic:** *The Way to Freedom*

**Background Scripture:** Exodus 2:23—3:14; 19:1-9

**Scripture Lesson:** Exodus 19:1-9

**Memory Verse:** *If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples.* Exodus 19:5

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *God's Promise to Moses*

**Background Scripture:** Exodus 19:1-8

**Scripture Lesson:** Exodus 19:1-8

**Memory Verse:** *If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples.* Exodus 19:5

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

Sept. 15 M.: Drawn from the Water. Exod. 2:1-10

Sept. 16 T.: Running from Danger. Exod. 2:11-25

Sept. 17 W.: Hearing God's Call. Exod. 3:1-10

Sept. 18 T.: Protest and Promise. Exod. 3:11-22

Sept. 19 F.: The Song of Victory. Exod. 15:1-13

Sept. 20 S.: Promising to Obey God. Exod. 19:1-8

Sept. 21 S.: Learning God's Way. Exod. 33:9-19

LESSON AIM

To help us see the importance of obeying God's voice.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** probably about 1440 B.C.

**Place:** Mount Sinai, in the Sinai Peninsula

LESSON OUTLINE

**God's Covenant and Moses**

**I. The Oppression in Egypt:** Exodus 2:23-25

A. The Israelites in Slavery: v. 23

B. God's Remembrance of His Covenant: v. 24

C. God's Concern for the Israelites: v. 25

**II. Moses and the Burning Bush:** Exodus 3:1-6

A. The Unusual Sight: vv. 1-3

B. The Voice of God: v. 4

C. Holy Ground: vv. 5-6

**III. Moses' Call: Exodus 3:7-10**

- A. The Proposed Deliverance: vv. 7-9
- B. The Chosen Messenger: v. 10

**IV. Moses' Excuses: Exodus 3:11-14**

- A. The First Excuse and Reply: vv. 11-12
- B. The Second Excuse and Reply: vv. 13-14

**V. The Israelites at Mount Sinai: Exodus 19:1-9**

- A. Arrival at Sinai: vv. 1-2
- B. God's Message to the Israelites: vv. 3-6
- C. The Response of the People: vv. 7-8
- D. The Divine Voice: v. 9

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

We noted last week that Abraham was unquestionably the most important single individual in the Old Testament. Today we see that Moses was the second most important. Abraham was the *father* of the Israeli people, but Moses was the *founder* of the nation.

Furthermore, Moses is supposed to have written the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. These were the books called the Law (Hebrew, *Torah*), that were held in highest esteem by the Israelites throughout their history. Moses was the great law-giver of Israel.

Not only does Moses' name occur nearly seven hundred times in the Old Testament, but it is found eighty times in the New Testament. So Moses is undoubtedly one of the most important human characters in the whole Bible. Even though Jesus came to bring in the new covenant, grace instead of law, our Lord paid high respect to the place Moses filled in the divine plan of history.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

Young people like to feel that they are free; they get a big "kick" out of doing their own thing.

But soon they discover that even though they may seek freedom from human authority—at home and at school—they are in bondage to sin. And this is the worst slavery of all. That inner sinful self is the most tyrannical slavemaster anyone can have.

And so we need divine deliverance, as Israel did from slavery in Egypt. The wonderful truth is that God can deliver from one as well as the other. All we need to do is to cry to Him for help as the Israelites did.

But as soon as the people of Israel were delivered from Egyptian bondage, they were given the law at Sinai. And, like the Israelites, we need to learn that true freedom comes only in obedience to God's law.

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. We are all born in slavery to sin.
2. Only God can deliver us from that slavery.
3. Jesus came to be our Redeemer, to purchase our freedom.
4. In Him, and only in Him, are we free.



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE OPPRESSION IN EGYPT: Exodus 2:23-25

#### A. The Israelites in Slavery: v. 23

In Genesis we read that Joseph was the prime minister of Egypt—perhaps the greatest nation in the world at that time. His relatives were given the best area in the whole of Egypt, the land of Goshen in the eastern part of the fertile delta.

But then Joseph and all his brothers died (1:6), and soon “a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt” (1:8). This was not only “a new king” but a new dynasty, as we know from history. The kings of this new dynasty began to subject the Israelites to an unbearable slavery.

During this time Moses was born and miraculously preserved from death (1:22—2:6). Providentially he was nursed—not only physically but spiritually—by his own godly mother (2:7-9). Finally he was brought up at Pharaoh’s court (2:10). There “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action” (Acts 7:22). He was being prepared in mind for his great future work.

But he needed to be prepared in heart. At forty years of age (Acts 7:23-29) Moses tried to strike a blow for his own people (Exod. 2:11-14), but it was in the wrong way. And so he had to flee to Midian, where he married. There he kept the flock of his father-in-law (2:15-22).

Our lesson today begins with the words, “during that long period” (v. 23). From Acts 7:30 we learn that Moses spent forty years in Midian. This towering giant of history spent eighty years—forty in intellectual preparation and forty in spiritual preparation—for the final forty years of unparalleled service. If one wants to do a great work for God, he must not short-change his ministry by failing to take adequate time for preparation.

“The king of Egypt died” (v. 23), but his successor was also cruel and continued the oppression. “The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.” It was a dark hour indeed, but the morning was about to break.

#### B. God’s Remembrance of His Covenant: v. 24

“God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.” Last week we noted God’s covenant with Abraham. This covenant was renewed with Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5) and with Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15). And God never forgets His covenant!

#### C. God’s Concern for the Israelites: v. 25

“So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.” Note the four things said here about the LORD: He *heard*, He *remembered*, He *looked*, and He *was concerned*. Our God is a loving God, and thus a caring God.

It was painfully evident to the Israelites that Pharaoh didn’t care. And it was equally obvious that the Egyptians didn’t either. Did anybody care?

We may feel sometimes that we are in the same position. Everything is going wrong. Our troubles are more than we can bear. We don’t know what to do. We are at the end of ourselves.

It is then that we need to realize: God cares! And looking to Him we find deliverance.

### II. MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH: Exodus 3:1-6

#### A. The Unusual Sight: vv. 1-3

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian” (v. 1). But in 2:18 we read that

Zipporah's father (cf. v. 21) was named Reuel. How can we reconcile these statements?

Adam Clarke offers this explanation: "Learned men are not agreed on the signification of the word *chothen*, which we translate 'father-in-law,' and which in Gen. xix. 14 we translate 'son-in-law.' It seems to be a general term for a 'relative by marriage,' and the connection only in which it stands can determine its precise meaning. It is very possible that Reuel was now dead, it being forty years since Moses came to Midian; that Jethro was his son, and had succeeded him in his office as prince and priest of Midian; that Zipporah was the sister of Jethro; and that consequently the word *chothen* should be translated 'brother-in-law' in this place. . . . If this conjecture be right, we may well suppose that, Reuel being dead, Moses was continued by his brother-in-law, Jethro, in the same employment he had under his father" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 93).

Moses "led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God." Horeb is just another name for Sinai. Clarke comments: "The mountain itself had two peaks; one was called Horeb, the other Sinai. Horeb was probably the primitive name of the mountain, which was afterwards called the *mountain of God* because God appeared upon it to Moses; and Mount Sinai, from *seneh*, a 'bush,' because it was in a bush, a flame of fire, that this appearance was made" (p. 93).

In the first part of verse 2 we read: "There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush." From verse 4 it is obvious that this was not an angel, a created being. For it is the Creator Himself who speaks to Moses out of the bush. "The angel of the Lord" means God Himself—what is called a theophany, a God-appearance.

Moses observed that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So he decided to go over and look at this "strange sight." A fire that did not consume—that was something else!

## B. The Voice of God: v. 4

As Moses approached, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Reverently Moses answered, "Here I am." At eighty years of age this man was confronted by God in a miraculous way.

God knows all our names, and He has a way of speaking to us in such a manner that we can clearly understand what He is saying to us. These times when God speaks to us should be cherished as the greatest moments of our lives.

## C. Holy Ground: vv. 5-6

The Lord warned Moses not to come any closer. And then He said, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (v. 5).

Moses' sandals were a symbol of his contact with the world in which he walked. For us the lesson is that when we come into God's presence—for instance, in the sanctuary on Sunday morning—we should lay aside the thoughts of the week, the cares and concerns of our workaday world, and concentrate our attention on the things of God. Even the social consciousness of being with our fellow-worshippers should take second place to sensing God's presence. In a very real way we should be alone before Him as Moses was.

The voice from the bush was now identified: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (v. 6). Jesus quoted these words and then made the application: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt. 22:32). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were, and are, still alive.

Appropriately, "Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God." If even the seraphs, holy creatures made to dwell in the very presence of Deity, covered their faces (Isa. 6:2), certainly we poor mortals should feel a deep sense of awe and reverence when we come before Him.



### III. MOSES' CALL:

Exodus 3:7-10

#### A. The Proposed Deliverance: vv. 7-9

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering" (v. 7). What a loving God!

So He had come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and bring them into "a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (v. 8). Compared with the narrow area of Goshen, Canaan would indeed be spacious. There the Israelites could enjoy peace and prosperity, free from their oppressors. Though they did not realize it, God had been watching their situation (v. 9).

#### B. The Chosen Messenger: v. 10

Moses must have been startled when the Lord said to him, "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." Moses had tried once, in his own strength, and had failed. But now he was commissioned by the omnipotent One, and success was assured.

### IV. MOSES' EXCUSES:

Exodus 3:11-14

#### A. The First Excuse and Reply: vv. 11-12

Moses' immediate reaction was, "Who am I?" He was a bit brash when he stepped out of Pharaoh's palace to fight for his people forty years earlier. But forty years of caring for sheep in lonely places had made him a humble man.

The Lord's answer was, "I will be with you" (v. 12). The "I" is emphatic. It is not who *you* are but who *I* am! If the Almighty God was with him, he could make it. And when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they would worship at that mountain.

### B. The Second Excuse and Reply:

vv. 13-14

Moses wanted to be very sure who it was that was sending him. If the Israelites asked what the Lord's name was, "What shall I say?" (v. 13, NASB). These were two vital questions he asked, and he needed answers.

What was God's name? "I am who I am." Our God is the great "I AM," the eternally existent One, the all-powerful, all-knowing One. He was sufficient for Israel's need at that hour, and He is sufficient for all our needs now!

### V. THE ISRAELITES AT MOUNT SINAI:

Exodus 19:1-9

#### A. Arrival at Sinai: vv. 1-2

Between the two parts of our lesson a lot of things have happened—Moses' interviews with Pharaoh, the ten plagues on Egypt, the first passover, the exodus, the deliverance at the Red Sea, the giving of the manna, water from the rock, the defeat of the Amalekites, and Jethro's visit with Moses. Now we read: "In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. . . and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain."

The question might well be raised: Why did the New International Version change "wilderness" (KJV, NASB) to "desert"? The answer is this: The term *wilderness* conjures up in most minds today the picture of an uninhabited area covered with trees and underbrush, but Sinai is a sandy desert. "Wilderness" is sometimes used in the secondary sense of "an extensive area that is barren or empty" (see *American Heritage Dictionary*), yet modern maps correctly call this the Desert of Sinai.

#### B. God's Message to the Israelites: vv. 3-6

"Moses went up to God" (v. 3). This evidently means part way up the side of Mount Sinai, for we read immediately

that “the LORD called to him from the mountain”—presumably from the top of Mount Sinai.

Moses was to tell the Israelites: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt [in the ten plagues and in the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea] and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (v. 4).

This is a beautiful picture. Just as the parent eagle with its strong pinions carries the baby eaglets on its wings to the place chosen by the parent, so God had carried the Israelites on His wings of omnipotence out of Egypt and to Himself at Mount Sinai. There He was meeting with them, there He would soon give them the Ten Commandments (c. 20), and there they would build the tabernacle (cc. 35–40)—God’s dwelling place in their midst.

But there was a condition attached: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (v. 5). As His people today, heirs of the promises made way back there, we ought to revel and rejoice in this marvelous privilege. We ought to act as though we are conscious of being God’s treasured possession. This means that we do not try to have our own way but daily seek to let Him have His beautiful way in our lives.

The Lord goes on to say: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (v. 6). This idea is picked up in the New Testament in I Peter 2:5, 9 and in Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6.

Kings and priests—what a challenge! We are told that we will reign with Christ in His millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:6). But even now we are to carry on our priestly function of “offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Peter 2:5). And we are to represent men to God, and God to men.

### C. The Response of the People: vv. 7–8

“So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set

before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak” (v. 7). Moses was faithful in carrying out his assignment (cf. vv. 3, 6).

Who were these “elders”? They were the heads of the tribes and the heads of the families within the tribes. The social structure of that day was a patriarchal one, with married sons bringing up their families in proximity to the patriarch of the home.

Why did Moses summon only the elders? Because there were so many Israelites that they could not possibly all hear his voice at one time. The family heads were to take the message Moses received from the Lord and carry it back to their individual family clans. Thus the divine message would reach all the people. The lack of strong family structure is a major weakness of modern society.

When they heard God’s message, the people all responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said” (v. 8). Moses conveyed to the Lord their response.

The immediate reaction of the people was excellent. What a tragedy it was that they did not follow through on this, but soon broke God’s commands.

But too often we find this same situation today. People are quick to make promises of loyalty and obedience, but some soon renege on their promises and fail to obey what the Lord has told them to do. Fickleness is a great enemy of faithfulness.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does God feel about oppressed peoples today?
2. How should we feel about them?
3. What should we do for them?
4. What is meant by “holy ground”?
5. How do we keep God’s covenant with us?
6. How can we be stable, steady Christians?

### D. The Divine Voice: v. 9

The Lord told Moses that He was coming to him in a "dense cloud." We find this prediction fulfilled on the third day (v. 16), after the people had been consecrated for two days (vv. 10-15).

The spectacular divine appearance to Moses was for the expressed purpose of causing the people to put their trust in their appointed leader. Moses needed this divine support.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The incident of Moses putting off his sandals in God's presence is still practiced widely in the Orient. While I was in the Orient for six months in 1967 I always preached with no shoes on. In fact, we took off our shoes before entering the sanctuary.

But it was in India that we saw the complete fulfillment of this ancient command. In a nice church building on

Sunday morning the national pastor stood barefooted behind the pulpit as he conducted the service, though he wore a western-style jacket! And of course I preached in my stocking feet.

We need to find some application for ourselves in our western culture. We must put off the earthly contacts as we enter God's holy presence.

September 28, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND JOSHUA

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Psalm 15

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and Joshua*

**Youth Topic:** *Doing What You Say*

**Background Scripture:** Joshua 24:1-31; Judges 2

**Scripture Lesson:** Joshua 24:14-25

**Memory Verse:** *The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.* Joshua 24:24

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *God's Promise to Joshua*

**Background Scripture:** Joshua 1:1-6; 24:1-31

**Scripture Lesson:** Joshua 24:14-25

**Memory Verse:** *The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.* Joshua 24:24

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

Sept. 22 M.: Joshua's Good Advice. Josh. 23:1-3, 11-16

Sept. 23 T.: Joshua Remembers God's Blessing. Josh. 24:1-8

Sept. 24 W.: Joshua Gives an Example. Josh. 24:9-18

Sept. 25 T.: The People Choose God. Josh. 24:19-31

Sept. 26 F.: The People Forget God. Judg. 2:1-13

Sept. 27 S.: Another Opportunity. Judg. 2:14-23

Sept. 28 S.: God's Word to Joshua. Josh. 1:1-9

LESSON AIM

To emphasize the importance of keeping our promises.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** probably around 1400 B.C.

**Place:** Shechem, near the center of Palestine

LESSON OUTLINE

**God's Covenant and Joshua**

**I. God's Dealings with His People:** Joshua 24:1-13

A. An Important Assembly: v. 1

B. Abraham to Jacob: vv. 2-4

C. The Exodus and Wandering: vv. 5-7

D. Defeat of Amorites and Moabites: vv. 8-10

E. Conquest of Canaan: vv. 11-13

**II. Joshua's Challenge to Israel: Joshua 24:14-15**

- A. Ban on Idolatry: v. 14
- B. Joshua's Own Choice: v. 15

**III. The People's Response: Joshua 24:16-18**

- A. Professed Loyalty: v. 16
- B. Acknowledgment of God's Care: vv. 17-18a
- C. Promise to Serve the Lord v. 18b

**IV. Joshua's Concern: Joshua 24:19-24**

- A. A Faithful Warning: vv. 19-20
- B. A Fruitful Dialogue: vv. 21-24

**V. Joshua's Covenant: Joshua 24:25-27****VI. Disobedience and Distress: Judges 2:1-5**

Though Joshua would probably not be listed among the three greatest men of the Old Testament, he would perhaps deserve fourth place. For it was he who led the Israelites in the conquest of their Promised Land and who supervised the allotment of territory to the various tribes.

We first meet Joshua in the seventeenth chapter of Exodus. When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites at Rephidim, Moses commissioned Joshua to lead the Israelite army against them (v. 9), with victorious results (v. 13). He is later called Moses' "aide" (Exod. 24:13; 33:11). In Numbers 11:28 we learn that he "had been Moses' aide since youth." So he was Moses' most trusted associate. In talking with Moses, the Lord called Joshua "your assistant" (Deut. 1:38). At that time Moses was told that he himself would not be permitted to enter Canaan. Instead, his young assistant would lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Doing what you say is the heart of our lesson today. The Israelites were quick to promise but slow to perform.

And that is what we find too often today. People are long on pledges and short on payments. They say what they will do but don't do it.

In the case of Joshua we see a different story. He asserted his loyalty to the Lord, and he never wavered from it. As long as he lived, the nation remained true to God.

Joshua stands as an example to all young people to let the Lord have His way fully in their lives. Because God could trust him to obey, He used him in a big way. And He will use every fully committed young person in an important task.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS****SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH****CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. God had used Joshua as a great leader.
2. But Joshua still had one important task: to have the Israelites make a covenant with God.
3. God still needs leaders for his work.
4. We should be ready to do whatever He wants us to.



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE:

Joshua 24:1-13

#### A. An Important Assembly: v. 1

"Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem." This was a city in the central part of Palestine and a sacred place of worship since the time of Abraham.

"All the tribes" does not necessarily mean all the Israelites, but that all the tribes were represented. The next sentence reads: "He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God"—perhaps in a special act of worship. Joshua knew that he needed to have the people make a covenant with God that they would obey Him.

#### B. Abraham to Jacob: vv. 2-4

Joshua's speech to the assembled people consisted largely of a review of God's dealings with His people. He began at the beginning—with Abraham.

Here we have an interesting bit of information. We are told specifically that Abraham's father Terah "worshiped other gods" (v. 2). Was Abraham at first an idolater? It would seem so.

Incidentally, "on the other side of the flood" (KJV), here (vv. 2, 3) and in verse 14 and 15, should be "beyond the River" (NASB, NIV). In the Old Testament "the River" means the Euphrates River.

God called Abraham out of his idolatrous surroundings and led him to the land of Canaan (v. 3). He gave to him the land of Canaan (v. 3). He gave him a son, Isaac (nothing is said about Ishmael). He also gave Isaac two sons, Jacob and Esau (v. 4). To Esau He assigned the mountains of Seir, east of the Dead Sea, whereas Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

#### C. The Exodus and Wandering: vv. 5-7

When the Egyptians oppressed the

Israelites, God sent Moses and Aaron (v. 5). Through them He plagued the Egyptians and rescued His people. When the armies of Egypt pursued the Israelites to the Red Sea (v. 6), God answered the cries of His people and destroyed the Egyptians miraculously (v. 7). "Then you lived in the desert for a long time"—actually about forty years. This was because of their disobedience.

#### D. Defeat of Amorites and Moabites: vv. 8-10

Before coming to Canaan, the Israelites were confronted by the Amorites, who lived east of the Jordan River. They fought against Israel, but God destroyed them before His people, who then took possession of the Amorite territory (v. 8). Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse the Israelites (v. 9), but God overruled, so that instead Balaam blessed them (v. 10).

#### E. Conquest of Canaan: vv. 11-13

When the Israelites finally crossed the Jordan River they were confronted by the impregnable city of Jericho with its high walls. But God miraculously caused those walls to fall, and the Israelites took this powerful city. They also defeated the seven nations in the land of Canaan. (The Amorites lived on both sides of the Jordan River.) It was not the Israelites' sword or bow that drove out these nations, but God's miraculous power.

It was God who gave the Israelites a land on which they had not toiled, cities they had not built, and vineyards and olive groves they had not planted. It was all a gift of His love to His people.

### II. JOSHUA'S CHALLENGE TO ISRAEL:

Joshua 24:14-15

#### A. Ban on Idolatry: v. 14

"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the



gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD." This discloses the fact that some Israelites had been unfaithful to God even in Egypt and had worshiped false gods. Idolatry was the besetting sin of Israel from its earliest days until the time of the Babylonian captivity. It took that long affliction to cure the nation.

### B. Joshua's Own Choice: v. 15

If they did not want to serve the Lord, then let them choose for themselves that very day whom they wished to serve (v. 15), whether the gods their forefathers served in Mesopotamia—fire, light, the sun, etc.—or the gods of the Amorites—Baal and Astarte. Adam Clarke writes: "Joshua well knew that all service that was not free and voluntary could be only deceit and hypocrisy. He therefore calls upon the people to make their choice, for God himself will not force them—they must serve Him with all their hearts if they served Him at all" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 263).

As far as Joshua himself was concerned, he had already made his choice—fully and irrevocably. He said to the assembled Israelites: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Regardless of what all the other Israelites did, he and his family were going to be true.

Here Joshua stands head and shoulders above the crowd. How much the Lord needs leaders like that today—people who will courageously take their stand and put themselves on record for the right, regardless of the cost or consequences.

And it paid off. For we read in verse 31: "Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel." His courageous stand for God saved a whole generation! The impact of one man's life is often beyond computation. What a challenge to all of us!

## III. THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE:

Joshua 24:16-18

### A. Professed Loyalty: v. 16

Joshua's challenge struck home. The people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!" And they seem to have been sincere. For, as we have just noted, that generation did serve the Lord.

Why, then, do we read about their repeated apostasies in the Book of Judges? The people failed to train their children to follow the Lord. Somehow there was a breakdown in parental influence—at least, in effective influence.

Again, it is not enough for us to be true to the Lord ourselves. We must do our best to see that our children follow Him. Of course, we can't force them. Serving God has to be one's own voluntary choice. But we do need to surround our children with prayer and with a happy Christian atmosphere in the home. Above all else, we must set before them each day an example of sincere, consistent Christian living.

### B. Acknowledgment of God's Care: vv. 17-18a

The people's gratitude here is very commendable. They acknowledged the fact that it was "the LORD our God himself" (v. 17) who had brought them and their forefathers "up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery." He it was who had "performed those great signs before our eyes"—the ten plagues in Egypt, the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, the provision of manna and of water out of a rock in the desert.

Furthermore, "He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled." It takes the entire Book of Numbers to recount all of this.

But this was not all. "And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land"—that is, in Canaan. This is the story of the Book of Joshua.

### C. Promise to Serve the Lord: v. 18b

"We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God." The people came through nobly at this point. In the light of what God had done for them in the past, there was no other reasonable conclusion.

## IV. JOSHUA'S CONCERN:

Joshua 24:19-24

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### A. A Faithful Warning: vv. 19-20

Joshua said to the people: you are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins" (v. 19). This is a good example of the fact that if we just take the *words* of the Bible in an over-literal sense, we can get into all kinds of error. We have to face the obvious *meaning* of the words.

Adam Clarke puts the case well when he writes: "If we are to take this literally, we cannot blame the Israelites for their defection from the worship of the true God: for if it was impossible for them to serve God, they could not but come short of His kingdom. But surely this was not the case . . . the meaning of the place must be, 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is holy and jealous, *unless* ye put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the flood. For He is a jealous God, and will not give to nor divide His glory with any other. He is a holy God, and will not have His people defiled with the impure worship of the Gentiles'" (*Commentary*, p. 263). This makes sense. And if the Bible is the Word of God, an intelligent God, it has to make sense!

Then Joshua issued his warning: "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you" (v. 20). How could the Israelites, who had experienced God's marvelous deliverance of them from Egyptian slavery, ever turn away from Him? This is one of the many unanswerable questions of history.

But later generations did forsake the Lord and did bring disaster on themselves, over and over again. And finally God had to bring an "end" to the nation in 586 B.C., in the Babylonian captivity. As we have noted before, it was in the traumatic exile that the Israelites were finally and forever cured of idolatry. Now they are a nation again, the state of Israel.

### B. A Fruitful Dialogue: vv. 21-24

The response of the people to Joshua's faithful warning was: "No! We will serve the LORD" (v. 21). Adam Clarke aptly observes: "So they understood the words of Joshua to imply no moral impossibility on their side; and had they earnestly sought the gracious assistance of God, they would have continued steady in His covenant" (*Commentary*, p. 263).

Joshua's reply was: "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD" (v. 22). Adam Clarke points out the implications of this: "You have been sufficiently apprised of the difficulties in your way—of God's holiness—your own weakness and inconstancy—the need you have of divine help, and the awful consequences of apostasy; and now you deliberately make your choice. Remember, then, that you are witnesses against yourselves" (*Commentary*, p. 263).

The people answered, "Yes, we are witnesses." They thereby took full responsibility for carrying out their promise.

Joshua picked up the logical consequence of this pledge. "Now then," he said, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel" (v. 23). This clearly implies that some of the Israelites actually had in their possession at that time the images of pagan deities. It is hard to understand this, but their history shows how this happened again and again. No wonder Josh-

ua was concerned for them to follow through on their promise!

The people then renewed their pledge. They said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him" (v. 24). In saying this, they also agreed to carry out Joshua's command in the previous verse. If they were going to serve the Lord, they must get rid of the idols they had.

Prompt action is the only way to implement a moral decision. When we act, we strengthen our wills.

## V. JOSHUA'S COVENANT:

Joshua 24:25-27

"On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws" (v. 25). The Hebrew literally says "Joshua cut the covenant." This alludes to an ancient custom that is recalled in Genesis 15, when God made a covenant with Abram. In obedience to the Lord's command (v. 9) the patriarch brought a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old. Then we read that he "cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other" (v. 10). What was the result? "A smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram" (vv. 17-18). So making a covenant was called "cutting the covenant."

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was Joshua so concerned at the end of his life?
2. What should we, as older people, do in a similar situation?
3. What is the preventative against backsliding?
4. What are some idols that people worship today?
5. How can people strengthen their steadfastness?
6. What warning do we find in Judges following Joshua?

We read: "And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God" (v. 26). Adam Clarke makes this suggestion: "He wrote the words of the covenant in the book of the law of God, probably in some part of the skin constituting the great roll, on which the laws of God were written, and of which there were some blank columns to spare" (*Commentary*, p. 263). The sacred scrolls always consisted of animal skins.

Joshua then "took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD." This shows that there was a sacred shrine at Shechem.

Then Joshua said to all the people: "See! This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God" (v. 27). The idea was that the stone was a permanent, not passing, thing. It would always be there as a witness to what took place at that point.

This custom of using a stone as a witness was a very ancient one. Laban said to Jacob, "Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I" (Gen. 31:44). Then we read, "So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar" (v. 45). The relatives made a heap of stones and ate there (v. 46). They called the pile of stones a "witness heap," witnessing to their covenant.

## VI. DISOBEDIENCE AND

DISTRESS:

Judges 2:1-5

A new generation had superseded the one that made the covenant with Joshua at Jericho. While the Book of Joshua is a thrilling story of conquest, the Book of Judges is a sad story of defeat and failure, as we find already in chapter 1.

Now comes this pathetic scene at the beginning of chapter 2. The angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal, where the tabernacle was. This was God Himself, appearing in the form of an angel. For He speaks in the first person: "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you

into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you'" (v. 1).

But the people had broken His covenant and disobeyed God's command to destroy all the altars and idols of the pagan people of Canaan (v. 2). There-

fore God would not drive out the inhabitants of the land, but leave them as thorns to the Israelites (v. 3).

When the people heard this message, they wept. They called the place Bokim, which means "weepers."

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Every generation must have its Joshuas if the work of God is going to prosper. For people easily forget God and go back into sin, unbelief, and darkness. This has happened throughout Christian history.

And then God raises up another Joshua. One thinks of Luther, Calvin, and Knox, of Fox and Wesley, of Moody and Finney.

We could name some Joshuas of our generation. But we forbear for fear of omitting some that should be cited.

The challenge we need to face is this: Are we going to be on the side of the Joshuas, or of the weak worldlings in the church? We must not fail God!



October 5, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND DAVID

DEVOTIONAL READING	Romans 14:1-9
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>God's Covenant and David</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Can You Rely on God?</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> II Samuel 7; I Chronicles 16:1-36</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> II Samuel 7:8-16</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.</i> II Samuel 7:16</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>A King's Praise for God's Promise</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> II Samuel 7; I Chronicles 16:1-36</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> I Chronicles 16:7-25</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!</i> I Chronicles 16:34</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>Sept. 29 M.: Desire to Honor God. II Sam. 7:1-7</p> <p>Sept. 30 T.: God Honors and Reassures His Own. II Sam. 8:8-17</p> <p>Oct. 1 W.: Right Response to God's Goodness. II Sam. 7:18-24</p> <p>Oct. 2 T.: A Plea for Blessing. II Sam. 7:25-29</p> <p>Oct. 3 F.: Gratitude in Worship. I Chron. 1:1-7</p> <p>Oct. 4 S.: A God of Love to Proclaim. I Chron. 1:23-24</p> <p>Oct. 5 S.: Honoring the Lord in Everything. Rom. 14:1-9</p>
LESSON AIM	To increase our wonder at God's gracious dealings with David.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> about 1000 B.C.</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Jerusalem</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>God's Covenant and David</b></p> <p><b>I. David's Desire to Build God's House:</b> II Samuel 7:1-7</p> <p>A. Remark to Nathan: vv. 1-2</p> <p>B. Reply of Nathan: v. 3</p> <p>C. Reaction of God: vv. 4-7</p>



**II. God's Promise to David: II Samuel 7:8-11a**

- A. God's Choice of David: v. 9a
- C. God's Promise to David: v. 9b
- D. God's Provision for Israel: vv. 10-11a

**III. David's House to be Established: II Samuel 7:11b-16**

- A. A Firm Promise: v. 11b
- B. David's Son to Be a Strong King: v. 12
- C. God's Appointed Builder: v. 13
- D. God's Care of David's Son: vv. 14-15
- E. David's Throne Established Forever: v. 16

**IV. David's Prayer of Thanksgiving: II Samuel 7:18-29****V. David's Provision for the Ark: I Chronicles 16:1-6****VI. David's Psalm of Thanks: I Chronicles 16:7-36**

So far we have been studying "The Old Covenant in Its Early Stages"—God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Joshua. Now we begin Unit II of this quarter: "The Old Covenant in Its Later Stages." Here we study God's covenant with David, then Solomon's idolatry, and finally God's covenant in relation to Jeremiah and Ezra.

Probably most Bible students would agree that David ranks third, after Abraham and Moses, in the trio of outstanding men in the Old Testament. Whereas Abraham was the father and Moses the founder of the nation of Israel, David was its greatest king and the founder of a dynasty that lasted until the exile. Not only that, but the coming Messiah would carry the title, "the son of David," as well as "the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). No greater divine honor has ever been conferred on any monarch than was given to King David, as we find in our lesson today.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

**Can you rely on God? Yes!**

David did. God called David from the humble task of tending sheep—as one can still see children doing in Palestine—and made him ruler over His people Israel. But He didn't stop there. He promised David that his dynasty would last forever. And in Christ, "the Son of David," that promise will be completely fulfilled.

The greatest honor that can come to any young person is the call of God—first to salvation and then to service. In that salvation we are in *fellowship* with Christ, and in that service we are in *partnership* with Him. Incidentally, the same Greek word, *koinonia*, is used for both of these. It is also translated "communion."

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. God is faithful to His promises.
2. We find His promises for us in the Bible.
3. We should memorize many of them.
4. Then we should trust God to fulfill them.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. DAVID'S DESIRE TO BUILD GOD'S HOUSE:

II Samuel 7:1-7

#### A. Remark to Nathan: vv. 1-2

At Hebron David had been anointed king of Judah (II Sam. 2:4), and he filled that position for seven years. Then he was made king of all Israel and reigned for thirty-three more years (5:3-5). He conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his new capital (5:6-9). He became more and more powerful, because "the LORD God Almighty was with him" (5:10). He defeated the Philistines (5:17-25), who had been the main enemies of Saul. Having done that, he brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem and placed it in a tent he had pitched for it (c. 6).

Now that he was settled safely in his palace at Jerusalem and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him (7:1), David began to think of what he should do next. One day he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent" (v. 2). This did not seem appropriate.

#### B. Reply of Nathan: v. 3

The prophet immediately felt the reasonableness of David's words. So he said to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you." Adam Clarke says of Nathan: "In this case he gave his judgment as a pious and prudent man, not as a prophet; for the prophets were not always under divine afflatus; it was only at select times they were thus honored" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 323).

#### C. Reaction of God: vv. 4-7

The Lord had other plans. Nathan had expressed his spontaneous reaction to the implications of David's remark. But that night the Lord spoke to the prophet and gave him a decidedly different message.

Was David to build God's house? (v. 5). The Lord reminded him that ever since the Israelites left Egypt, the divine presence had been manifested in a simple tent or tabernacle (v. 6). Had He ever asked the leaders of Israel to build Him a house of cedar? (v. 7). The obvious answer was no.

### II. GOD'S PROMISE TO DAVID: II Samuel 7:8-11a

#### A. God's Choice of David: v. 8

The Lord reminded David that He had taken him as a humble shepherd boy and had made him ruler over His people, Israel. The story of the divine choice of David is told vividly in I Samuel 16:1-13 and celebrated in Psalm 78:70-72. From being a shepherd of sheep, God had made him the shepherd of His people. The first task helped to prepare him for the second one, as in the case of Moses. And David did a good job as the shepherd of Israel, for we read in verse 72:

And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;  
with skillful hands he led them.

#### B. God's Care of David: v. 9a

"I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you." David's enemies were many. His first great enemy was King Saul, who was jealous of him and tried many times to kill him. His perennial enemies were the Philistines, who lived on the southern sea-coast of Palestine—which, incidentally, was so named because of the Philistines. "When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him" (5:17). As was always his custom, "David inquired of the LORD" (5:19). The Lord told him what to do, and he defeated the Philistines (v. 20). When the Philistines came against him a second time (v. 22), again "David inquired

of the LORD" (v. 23). This time God gave him a different plan of attack. "So David did as the LORD commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer" (v. 25). If we would follow David's example here, we could always be victorious.

### C. God's Promise to David: v. 9b

"Now I will make your name great like the names of the greatest men of the earth." We are reminded of God's similar promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:2). We noted in that connection how remarkably the promise was fulfilled across the centuries. And the same is true in the case of David, who is honored as one of the greatest kings of all time. The highest honor is reflected in the opening verse of the New Testament, where our divine Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is called "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1).

We cannot expect such high honor on earth. But as members of the church of Christ, we have the *supreme* honor of being the bride of the Lamb, who is at the same time King of Kings and Lord of Lords. To be His bride forever—who could possibly conceive of a greater honor and privilege? It ought to thrill our hearts every day!

### D. God's Provision for Israel: vv. 10-11a

"And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel."

For forty years in the Sinai Desert the people had no home of their own. Even after they entered Canaan they had to fight for every piece of land they occupied. The period of the judges, moreover, had been a time of unrest and upheaval.

But now they would no longer be oppressed—as "at the beginning" in

Egypt, or during the time of God's appointed "leaders" over His people. Traditionally these have been called "judges." But their primary function was not that of presiding over court, as judges do today. Rather, they were military leaders who delivered God's people from their enemies.

## III. DAVID'S HOUSE TO BE ESTABLISHED: II Samuel 7:11b-16

### A. A Firm Promise: v.11b

"I will also give you rest from all your enemies." This ties in to verse 9a. But now the Lord makes an important promise: "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you." David's family would not be cut off, as was Saul's because of disobedience, but would continue through all time. In the first chapter of Matthew we find that family line traced from David down to Christ, a period of a thousand years. And it has without doubt continued to this day, as well as being perpetuated forever in "the Son of David."

The ancient Orientals thought of immortality in terms of the family name being carried on through all generations. God was promising David that this would be true in his case.

In verse 11 the King James Version reads: "The LORD . . . will make thee an house." Adam Clarke makes this apt observation: "You have in your heart to make Me a house; I have it in My heart to make you a house" (*Commentary*, p. 323). Isn't that just like the Lord? And He will do for us far greater things than we dreamed of or deserve.

### B. David's Son to Be a Strong King: v. 12

"When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom." This prediction was more than fulfilled in Solomon, David's son and successor, whose kingdom was established in a wider,



stronger way than was true at any other period in the history of Israel.

When the Lord said to Solomon, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (I Kings 3:5), the young king humbly requested "a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (3:9). The Lord was so pleased with this answer (3:10) that He promised to give to him what he asked, and also the greatest wisdom any man ever had, as well as riches and honor—"so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings" (3:13).

### C. God's Appointed Builder: v. 13

Now we come to the thing that had been concerning David. He had wanted to build a permanent, appropriate structure in which to place the ark (v. 2). Nathan had encouraged him to go ahead (v. 3). But now the prophet was delivering God's message to the king.

Lovingly the Lord promised David great blessing and honor, before disappointing him in his desire. But having promised him a lasting dynasty and a strong son as his successor, the Lord now said of this son: "He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

We have to go to the parallel account in I Chronicles to find the reason for this. David told Solomon: "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this

word of the LORD came to me; 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight'" (I Chron. 22:7-8).

### D. God's Care of David's Son: vv. 14-15

The Lord promised to be a father to David's son, and to treat him as his own son. This must have been a great consolation to David.

However, the Lord said that if the coming king did wrong, as a father he would have to, "punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men" (v. 14). This would be for his own good, to turn him back to God.

Then the Lord added: "But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you" (v. 15). This would seem to suggest definitely that Solomon was not finally lost.

### E. David's Throne Established Forever: v. 16

God promised David that his "house" (dynasty) and his kingdom would endure permanently; his throne would be established forever. Politically this did not take place, for the outward rule of the Davidic dynasty came to an end in 586 B.C. But spiritually this promise is being completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who will rule forever. In Christ all God's promises are fulfilled. See Isaiah 9:7 for the classic description of the Messiah's eternal reign.

## IV. DAVID'S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: II Samuel 7:18-29

When Nathan "reported to David all the words of this entire revelation" (v. 17), David "went in and sat before the LORD" (v. 18). He was overwhelmed with the sense of God's goodness and love.

Humbly he prayed: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family,

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were some of David's greatest characteristics?
2. What are some lessons we can learn from his life?
3. Why did God choose David as king?
4. What traits does God look for in our characters?
5. How does God make up for seeming disappointments?
6. How can we express our thanks to God?

that you have brought me this far?" (v. 18). But God had also promised a great future (v. 19). This led David to say, "How great you are, O Sovereign LORD!" (v. 22). He added: "And who is like your people Israel?" (v. 23).

Wisely and rightly he prayed: "And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, so that your name will be great forever" (vv. 25-26). David was concerned for God's glory as the ultimate outcome. And so should we be!

Because of God's promise, David had found courage to pray this prayer (v. 27). Again he burst out with praise: "O Sovereign LORD, you are God!" (v. 28). His heart was overflowing with gratitude.

Do we always take time to thank the Lord for His special blessings to us? We should!

## V. DAVID'S PROVISION FOR THE ARK:

### I Chronicles 16:1-6

In chapter 15 we read of David bringing the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem—in a sort of triumphal procession. Now we are told that they brought the ark and "set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it" (v. 1). After offering sacrifices to the Lord, David blessed the people (v. 2). "Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each Israelite man and woman" (v. 3). David had a big heart! He was always doing something for others. His whole attitude made people feel like worshiping the Lord.

David also provided for a regular

program of worship. "He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel" (v. 4). Asaph was the chief in this. In Book III of the Psalms the first eleven psalms (78-83) are attributed to Asaph in the heading. The Levites were to play their musical instruments regularly before the ark (v. 6).

## VI. DAVID'S PSALM OF THANKS: I Chronicles 16:7-36

"That day David first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanks to the LORD" (v. 7). Then come twenty-nine verses of praise and thanksgiving. It is one of the most beautiful psalms in the Bible.

Appropriately, he begins by saying (v. 8): "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name." The next verse begins: "Sing to him, sing praise to him." And the next verse: "Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice."

In fact, the psalm is a continuous paean of praise to the wonderful Lord who has done so much for His people. David calls on "all the earth" to sing to the Lord (v. 23). But he goes beyond that and bids the sea resound God's praises, and the fields be jubilant (v. 32). The heart of the whole matter is this:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is  
good;  
his love endures forever (v. 34).

We should join the people in saying "Amen" and "Praise the LORD" (v. 36).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

David was conscious that he was heir to a great heritage—God's covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (I Chron. 16:15-17). How much more should we glory in this realization. For we have a far greater heritage in Jesus Christ and in the great persons of Christian history than David did.

The consciousness of our religious

heritage should always fill our hearts with praise to God, but it should also make us feel a keen sense of responsibility to continue that heritage.

Suppose that Martin Luther or John Wesley had failed to carry out God's commission, where would the church be today? Where will it be tomorrow if we fail to do our part?



October 12, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND ISRAEL'S SIN

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

| Isaiah 55:6-11

| **Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and Israel's Sin*

| **Youth Topic:** *Serving God Only*

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

| **Background Scripture:** I Kings 11:1-13, 26-43, 12:25-33; 14

| **Scripture Lesson:** I Kings 11:4-13

| **Memory Verse:** *You shall have no other gods before me.*  
Exodus 20:3

CHILDREN

| **Topic:** *A King Forgets His Promises*

| **Background Scripture:** I Kings 11:1-13, 26-40; 12:25-33; 14

| **Scripture Lesson:** I Kings 11:4-13

| **Memory Verse:** *You shall have no other gods before me.*  
Exodus 20:3

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

| Oct. 6 M.: Dishonoring the Relationship with God. I Kings 11:1-8

| Oct. 7 T.: God's Reaction to Faithlessness. I Kings 11:9-13

| Oct. 8 W.: Preparation for Punishment. I Kings 11:26-33

| Oct. 9 T.: The Promise Given to Another. I Kings 11:34-40

| Oct. 10 F.: A Fatal Choice of Worldly Wisdom. I Kings 12:25-33

| Oct. 11 S.: Judgment on Willfulness. I Kings 14:1-10a

| Oct. 12 S.: The Faithful and Secure Way. Isa. 55:6-11

LESSON AIM

| To impress upon us the serious consequences of sin and disobedience.

LESSON SETTING

| **Time:** about 925 B.C.

| **Place:** Jerusalem

LESSON OUTLINE

| **God's Covenant and Israel's Sin**

| **I. Solomon's Many Wives:** I Kings 11:1-8

| **II. Solomon's Apostasy:** I Kings 11:4-8

| A. Influenced by His Wives: v. 4

| B. Worshiping Pagan Gods: v. 5

| C. Failing to Follow the Lord: v. 6

| D. Building Pagan Shrines: vv. 7-8

**III. Solomon's Punishment: I Kings 11:9-13**

- A. The Lord's Anger: vv. 9-10
- B. Loss of Kingdom: v. 11
- C. Mercy for David's Sake: v. 12
- D. A Divided Nation: v. 13

**IV. Jeroboam's Rebellion: I Kings 11:26-43**

- A. An Efficient Servant: vv. 26-28
- B. Prophecy of Ahijah: vv. 29-39
- C. Flight of Jeroboam: v. 40

**V. Jeroboam's Idolatry: I Kings 12:25-33**

- A. Concern About Losing His Kingdom: vv. 25-27
- B. Two Golden Calves: vv. 28-30
- C. A Rival Festival: vv. 31-33

Solomon spent seven years building the temple of the Lord, but thirteen years in the construction of his own palace (I Kings 6:38; 7:1). This gives us a little hint as to his priorities. It appears that Solomon's basic sin was selfishness—putting his own interests first.

This shows up all through his career. He was selfish and sensual. Why else would a man want seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines?

Well, perhaps there is another reason. Solomon craved popularity, the praise of the people. So he built up the most magnificent regime of any man in his day. He wanted the world to bow at his feet, and the world obliged, as we see in the case of the Queen of Sheba (10:1-10).

In the culture of that day one of the measures of a man's greatness was the size of his harem. In this contest King Solomon took the blue ribbon. But what tragic consequences followed!

Serving God only is the thrust of today's lesson. Solomon had a godly father, David, a man after God's own heart. David worshiped the Lord, and Him alone, all his days.

Solomon had the honor of building God's temple—one of the most magnificent temples of all time, with innumerable millions of dollars' worth of gold in it. Yet in his later years he turned away from the Lord and worshiped pagan gods.

Many young people from Christian homes are turning away from God and going after false gods—popularity, sex, money, success, possessions, alcohol, drugs. Are we guilty of giving place in our lives to any of these? We need to think first of the tragic consequences of such action.

1. Solomon had a great responsibility as king.
2. He was supposed to guide his people in the right way.
3. Instead he himself went into idolatry.
4. We must keep our promises to God.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. SOLOMON'S MANY WIVES:

I Kings 11:1-3

The King James Version says that King Solomon loved many "strange women," but the Hebrew simply says "foreign women" (NIV)—which is clear and accurate.

He had married Pharaoh's daughter and built a magnificent palace for her (7:8) in order to cement a firm alliance with Egypt, one of the most powerful nations in the world and his next door neighbor. David conquered nations all around him, but Solomon's policy was to marry a princess of each nation and thus guarantee peaceful relationships. It seemed like a smart idea, but it had devastating results. Outwardly there was peace, but inwardly the result was sin and idolatry.

In line with his adopted policy Solomon married into the royal families of David's ancient enemies—the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites—as well as the friendly Sidonians and the threatening Hittites—a powerful people in Asia Minor.

The Lord had carefully warned the Israelites through Moses: "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods" (v. 2). We find this prohibition and warning in Exodus 34:16.

Of the king's wives it is said, "Solomon held fast to them in love." Then we are given a most amazing statistic: "He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray" (v. 3). How could any man withstand the influence of a thousand women!

Many have questioned the fantastic figures here. But Joseph Hammond writes, "The harems of modern Persia and Turkey . . . have quite equalled that of Solomon" (*The Pulpit Commentary*, I Kings, p. 221).

In Deuteronomy 17:16-17 we read: "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or

make the people return to Egypt to get more of them. . . . He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold."

Solomon broke all three of these commands. Of the first we read: "Solomon accumulated chariots and horses . . . from Egypt" (10:26-29). We have already seen how he took "many wives." As far as silver and gold are concerned we find that Solomon annually received about twenty-five tons of gold (10:14) and "made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones" (10:27).

### II. SOLOMON'S APOSTASY:

I Kings 11:4-8

#### A. Influenced by His Wives: v. 4

As we have already intimated, it would probably be impossible for any man to withstand the influence of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. We are not surprised to read that they "led him astray" (v. 3), and "turned his heart after other gods" (v. 4). He asked for it!

The influence, of course, was gradual. At first "his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God as the heart of David his father had been" (v. 4). Solomon had been carefully warned about this (9:4-7). But he finally listened to so many women that he had no time to listen to God!

#### B. Worshiping Pagan Gods: v. 5

Solomon "followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites." The plural form, *Ashtaroth*, has already occurred many times in the Old Testament. But this is the first place where we find the singular, Ashtoreth (Greek, *Astarte*). Hammond says: "With Baal, she divided the worship of the Phoenicians ("Sidonians"). . . . It was really an

impure cultus of the reproductive powers. . . . Interesting proof of the existence of a temple to this goddess at Sidon is supplied by an inscription discovered there in 1855" (*Commentary*, p. 222).

Regarding "Molech" (Hebrew *Milcom*) Hammond says that Molech and Milcom were probably different (though similar) names for the same deity. He goes on to say: "This is 'the first direct historical allusion' to his worship in the Old Testament. A warning against it is found in Levit. xx. 2-5. He was the fire-god, as Baal was the sun-god, and the sacrifices offered to him were those of children, who would seem to have not only 'passed through the fire,' but to have been burned therein" (*Commentary*, p. 222). No wonder he is called "the detestable god" of the Ammonites! Why people would turn away from the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God of the Hebrews to a cruel monster like this is hard to understand.

### C. Failing to Follow the Lord: v. 6

Once more we are told that Solomon did not follow the Lord completely, as David had done. Instead, he "did evil in the eyes of the LORD." And this affected the whole nation.

### D. Building Pagan Shrines: vv. 7-8

"On a hill east of Jerusalem [the Mount of Olives] Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the detestable god of the Ammonites" (v. 7). Here the Hebrew has Molech, the same god as Milcom (cf. v. 5).

In II Kings 23:13 we read that good King Josiah, in his zealous religious reform, "desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption—the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon." What a

heritage Solomon had left for three centuries!

He not only built these shrines on the Mount of Olives, but "He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods" (v. 8). How Solomon, as the son of David and the builder of the Lord's temple in Jerusalem, could do such a thing is utterly beyond our comprehension. His famed wisdom had a big gap of folly in it!

## III. SOLOMON'S PUNISHMENT: I Kings 11:9-13

### A. The Lord's Anger: vv. 9-10

"The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice" (v. 9). The first time, early in his reign, God appeared to him in Gibeon during the night in a dream and said to him: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (3:5). Very wisely the humble young king asked for "a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (3:9).

In 9:1-2 we read: "When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon." And this time God warned the king carefully about the fatal results of apostasy (9:6-9). So we read here (11:10): "Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command."

No wonder God was angry with him and had to punish him! Adam Clarke comments: "Had not this man's delinquency been strongly marked by the divine disapprobation, it would have had a fatal effect on the morals of mankind. Vice is vice, no matter who commits it. Solomon was wise; he knew better; his understanding showed him the vanity as well as the wickedness of idolatry. God *had appeared unto him*



twice, and thus given him the most direct proof of His being and of His providence. The promises of God had been fulfilled to him in the most remarkable manner, and in such a way as to prove that they came by a divine counsel. All these were aggravations of Solomon's crimes, as to their demerit" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 345).

#### B. Loss of Kingdom: v. 11

Because of all this, the Lord said to Solomon: "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates." Adam Clarke suggests: "Was not this another warning from the Lord? And might not Solomon have yet recovered himself? Was there not mercy in this message which he might have sought and found?" (*Commentary*, p. 345). Perhaps so. One is reminded of God's pronouncement of doom on Nineveh, preached by Jonah to that wicked city. But when the people repented, the Lord relented.

#### C. Mercy for David's Sake: v. 12

"Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son." This was a very merciful provision; the blow was softened out of respect to David.

#### D. A Divided Kingdom: v. 13

"Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen." The dynasty of David must continue. And Jerusalem must remain the capital, as it probably would not have done if a man from the north had become king of all the nation. The "one tribe," of course, was Judah, which remained loyal to the house of David.

### IV. JEROBOAM'S REBELLION:

I Kings 11:26-43

#### A. An Efficient Servant: vv. 26-28

"Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon's officials" (v. 26). Here we have the familiar story of a servant rebelling against his master.

"Now Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the house of Joseph" (v. 28). The way to a higher position is to do well one's present tasks.

Jeroboam was "an Ephraimite" (v. 26), and so he was put in charge of the whole labor force of "the house of Joseph." This phrase probably refers to the northern part of the nation of Israel, where Ephraim was the dominant tribe. Finally Ephraim was the name given to the whole area. Later we read of Ephraim and Judah as the two entities in the land of Palestine (Isa. 11:13; Hos. 5:13; 6:4; etc.).

So the stage was being set for the division of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms. And Solomon was to blame.

#### B. Prophecy of Ahijah: vv. 29-39

As Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem one day, he was met by "Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh" (v. 29). This was a city in Ephraim, north of Bethel. Here is where the tabernacle was set up by Joshua and the Israelites (Josh. 18:1), and it remained there until the time of Samuel (I Sam. 1:3)—that is, through the entire period of the judges.

With no one else observing (v. 29), Ahijah took off the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces (v. 30). Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself." Why? Because the God of Israel says, "See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes" (v. 31).

Then Ahijah told Jeroboam what the Lord had already told Solomon (see

v. 13)—that for the sake of David and of the city of Jerusalem, one tribe would be reserved for the dynasty of David (v. 32).

Why was God going to split the kingdom? “I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molech the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in my ways” (v. 33). It is striking how often these pagan gods are named in this whole narrative.

Once more the Lord emphasized His respect for David and for His covenant with him. He had promised David a perpetual dynasty, as we noted last week. Now the Lord tells Jeroboam that He will give one tribe to Solomon’s son, “so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name” (v. 36).

Then the Lord, through His prophet, challenged Jeroboam: “If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands . . . I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one built for David” (v. 38). But Jeroboam failed, as we soon will see, and his dynasty did not last.

### C. Flight of Jeroboam: v. 40

It would seem that as a result of this incident Jeroboam “rebelled against the king” (v. 26). Solomon tried to kill him, but he fled for his life to Egypt. Here he stayed with Pharaoh Shishak until Solomon’s death.

## V. JEROBOAM’S IDOLATRY: I Kings 12:25–33

Rehoboam, Solomon’s son and successor, had gone to Shechem, where the Israelites had gathered to make him king (12:1). Jeroboam returned from Egypt and became the leader of the people in asking Rehoboam to lighten the heavy yoke his father had put on

them. (Solomon’s magnificent regime and immense harem could only be maintained by subjecting the people to heavy taxes.)

With reckless folly Rehoboam rejected the wise advice of his elders and followed that of the foolish young men who had grown up with him. The result was that the people revolted against him (v. 16). Only the tribe of Judah remained faithful to him (v. 17). “So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day” (v. 19). The tribe of Benjamin joined Judah in standing by Rehoboam (v. 21). God’s message through “Shemaiah the man of God” prevented a bloody civil war (vv. 22–24).

### A. Concern About Losing His Kingdom: vv. 25–27

Jeroboam fortified “Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim” and made it the capital of the new kingdom of Israel (v. 25). Meanwhile Rehoboam reigned in Jerusalem over the kingdom of Judah.

Unfortunately Jeroboam became fearful that if his subjects went down to Jerusalem for the annual feasts to offer sacrifices in the temple they might give their allegiance to Rehoboam. Then he, Jeroboam, would be eliminated (v. 27).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the dangers of self-indulgence?
2. Why is it necessary for Christians to marry Christians?
3. Was David too indulgent with Solomon when the latter was young?
4. Why is it important that each young person seek God in planning his own future?
5. How did Rehoboam’s bringing up affect him?
6. What are some lessons we can learn from Jeroboam’s life?

It was a real possibility, naturally speaking.

### B. Two Golden Calves: vv. 28-30

After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. Then he said to the people: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (v. 28). These are the same words that Aaron used when he made a golden calf at Sinai (Exod. 32:4). How Jeroboam could have been so stupid as to repeat this is impossible to understand. Also he knew that the only reason he was ruling over the ten tribes was that Solomon had gone into idolatry (11:33). He was surely ignoring history, which is always a dangerous thing to do!

Jeroboam set up one golden calf in Bethel, in the southern extremity of his kingdom, and the other at Dan, in the

far north (v. 29). "And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there" (v. 30).

### C. A Rival Festival: vv. 31-33

To keep the people from going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, Jeroboam "instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah" (v. 32). He built an altar at Bethel, only a few miles north of Jerusalem, to deter the people from going on to God's house.

Hereafter we find this idolatrous king referred to frequently as the one who "caused Israel to sin." This is an awful epithet to have attached to one's name. Jeroboam deliberately led the ten tribes into idolatry, finally resulting in the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and its subjection to Assyria.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Peace and prosperity are what we all want. But in the case of Solomon these proved to be a curse rather than a blessing. Because life was so easy, he became selfish and self-indulgent. On the other hand, David had lived a rugged life, but he remained true to God.

Perhaps that is why God allows

trials, tests, and hardships to come into our lives. These things tend to drive us to our knees and keep us close to God.

Wealth and political power certainly proved to be a snare to Solomon. We should keep ourselves "loose" to power and popularity and prosperity. Let Solomon's life be a warning to all of us!

October 19, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND JEREMIAH

### DEVOTIONAL READING

Ezekiel 18:25-32

**Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and Jeremiah*

**Youth Topic:** *A Faith Within*

### ADULTS AND YOUTH

**Background Scripture:** Jeremiah 31

**Scripture Lesson:** Jeremiah 31:1-3, 29-34

**Memory Verse:** *I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jeremiah 31:33*

### CHILDREN

**Topic:** *A Prophet Reminds the People*

**Background Scripture:** Jeremiah 1:1-9; 7:1-7

**Scripture Lesson:** Jeremiah 1:1-9

**Memory Verse:** *And those who know thy name put their trust in thee, for thou, O LORD hast not forsaken those who seek thee. Psalm 9:10*

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Oct. 13 M.: The Faithfulness of God. Jer. 31:1-6  
Oct. 14 T.: The Reward of the Faithful. Jer. 31:7-14  
Oct. 15 W.: Hope for the Future. Jer. 31:15-22  
Oct. 16 T.: Each One Is Responsible. Jer. 31:23-30  
Oct. 17 F.: A Covenant in the Heart. Jer. 31:31-40  
Oct. 18 S.: A Promise to the Faithful. Jer. 7:1-7  
Oct. 19 S.: Call to Repentance. Ezek. 18:25-32

### LESSON AIM

To increase our appreciation for the privilege of being under the new covenant.

### LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 600 B.C.

**Place:** Jerusalem

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### God's Covenant and Jeremiah

- I. **God's Purpose for Israel:** Jeremiah 31:1-6
  - A. A United People: v. 1
  - B. Rest for Israel: v. 2
  - C. God's Everlasting Love: v. 3
  - D. A Joyful Future: v. 4
  - E. A Fruitful Future: v. 5
  - F. A Unified Worship: v. 6



**II. A Regathered Israel: Jeremiah 31:7-14****III. A Fulfilled Picture: Jeremiah 31:15****IV. A Reunited Nation: Jeremiah 31:16-28****V. A New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:29-34**

A. An Ancient Proverb: vv. 29-30

B. A New Covenant: v. 31

C. Not Like the Old Covenant: v. 32

D. A Spiritual Covenant: v. 33

E. A Covenant of Forgiveness: v. 34

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

As is often true with the topical approach to the study of the Bible, we are jumping across the centuries and skipping many intervening books. We began this quarter with God's covenant with Noah after the flood. Then we skipped to the time of Abraham—only three chapters of the Bible,<sup>7</sup> yet covering centuries of time. Again we jumped over some five centuries to look at Moses and his successor, Joshua. Then we hopped over four centuries to the time of David, and of Solomon, passing by several books on the way. Today we are in Jeremiah, three centuries and thirteen books later.

But we are still on the same topic: "God's Covenant with His People." The specific terms of the various covenants have differed somewhat, but the central emphases have always been the same: God's faithfulness, His love, His concern for mankind, His utter dependability. When God makes a promise, we can know that He will keep His word!

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

A faith within is what the new covenant requires. God's old covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai dealt at length with specific regulations of outward conduct. The new covenant deals with the inner attitudes of the heart, as Jesus showed clearly in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jeremiah said that under the new covenant God would write His law on our hearts. This requires a full surrender of our wills to His will, a complete commitment of our hearts to obey Him, whatever the cost. When we have made that full commitment, God fills our hearts with the Holy Spirit, so that His Spirit can enable us to carry out His commands. We cannot do it ourselves alone, but we can let the Holy Spirit do it in us and for us.

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. Before Jeremiah was born, God chose him to be His prophet.
2. When God revealed this call to Jeremiah, he felt unequal to the task.
3. But God assured the prophet of His presence with him.
4. When God goes with us, we can carry out His will.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL: Jeremiah 31:1-6

#### A. A United People: v. 1

At the time of Solomon's death, as we noted last week, the Israelites were divided into two nations: the kingdom of Judah in the south and the kingdom of Israel in the north. That was near the end of the tenth century B.C. In 722 B.C., near the end of the eighth century, the northern kingdom was taken captive by Assyria, and its capital city, Samaria, fell. Now it is shortly after 600 B.C. and Jeremiah has already predicted the Babylonian captivity of Judah (Jer. 25:8-11). This soon took place in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

But Jeremiah has also just made a very comforting prophecy. He told the people that God declares: "The days are coming when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess" (Jer. 30:3). People from both kingdoms would return to the Promised Land.

Now we find (31:1) the Lord making a further declaration: "At that time I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people." There would no longer be two kingdoms, but all the twelve tribes would be reunited in the Holy Land.

This prophecy was fulfilled in a measure in the post-exilic period. But still the returning captives were under Gentile domination. Except for a brief period of partial independence under the Maccabees, the Israelites have not had political autonomy until the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Now they are a united nation. But they will not fully be "my people" until the return of Christ and their acceptance of Him as their Messiah (Rom. 11:11-27).

#### B. Rest for Israel: v. 2

There is a difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of this verse. The

King James Version and the New American Standard Bible both seem to refer it to Israel's passage through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan, under Moses. On the other hand, the New International Version makes it future, in line with verse one. Which is preferable?

Adam Clarke takes the latter view. "The people who survived the sword" means "Those of the ten tribes that had escaped death by the sword of the Assyrians." The "wilderness" refers to "The place of their exile; a wilderness, compared to their own land" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 636).

T. K. Cheyne, in *The Pulpit Commentary*, points out that the Israelites coming out of Egypt were not "the people of those left of the sword" (literal translation), for God had delivered them from battle, not out of it. Cheyne says that "found grace in the wilderness" refers to "the second great deliverance, namely from the Babylonian exile." He also suggests that the "perhaps preferable rendering" of "when I went to cause" (KJV) is "I will go to cause" (cf. NIV).

I prefer Clarke's view. For in the succeeding verses the Lord concentrates on "Samaria" (v. 5) and "Ephraim" (v. 6), both in the north.

#### C. God's Everlasting Love: v. 3

"The LORD appeared to us in the past" (marginal note, "from afar"; cf. NASB). If the former rendering (cf. KJV) is adopted, the reference may be to Deuteronomy 4:37 and 7:8, where God's love for Israel is declared. It is an "everlasting love" that is expressed in drawing His people to Himself.

Adam Clarke writes: "The exiles, who had not for a long time received any proofs of the divine protection, are represented as deploring their state. But God answers that, though this may seem to be the case, He has always

loved them; and this continued love He will show by bringing them out of their captivity" (*Commentary*, p. 636).

#### D. A Joyful Future: v. 4

I will build you up again  
and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin  
Israel.  
Again you will take up your  
tambourines  
and go out to dance with the joyful.

The restored Israel (the whole nation) would be considered a virgin, as if she had never sinned. This is the perennial marvel of God's grace to repentant, redeemed sinners.

The figure of taking tambourines and going out to dance should, of course, be interpreted in terms of that culture, where there was no such thing as men dancing with women. The picture here is of women dancing along in procession, playing on their tambourines the songs of Zion. Cheyne rightly observes that "joyousness is an essential part of the Biblical ideal both of religion and of a normal state of society: 'The joy of the Lord is your strength'" (*The Pulpit Commentary*, "Jeremiah," II, 10).

#### E. A Fruitful Future: v. 5

Again you will plant vineyards  
on the hills of Samaria;  
the farmers will plant them  
and enjoy their fruit.

The northern kingdom of Israel was called both "Samaria" and "Ephraim" (v. 6). Though this area had been captured by the Assyrians, it would once more be fruitful.

The careful Bible student may wonder why for "enjoy" the New American Standard Bible says in the margin "Lit. *defile*" and the King James Version has in the margin "Heb. *profane* them." Cheyne gives this explanation: "The law was that newly planted fruit trees should be left alone for three years; that in the fourth year their fruit should be

consecrated to God; and that in the fifth year their fruit might be 'profaned,' that is devoted to ordinary uses (comp. Deut. xx. 6; xxviii. 30)" (*The Pulpit Commentary*, "Jeremiah," II, 10).

#### F. A Unified Worship: v. 6

Jeroboam, it will be remembered, had put golden calves at Bethel and Dan to keep his subjects in the northern kingdom from going to Jerusalem. But now watchmen "on the hills of Ephraim" would cry out at festival time:

Come, let us go up to Zion,  
to the LORD our God.

So all Israel would once more join in the worship of the true God at Jerusalem. This was fulfilled in considerable measure after the return from captivity and will be completely fulfilled when Christ returns.

## II. A REGATHERED ISRAEL: Jeremiah 31:7-14

The "remnant of Israel" (v. 7) would be saved. God says (v. 8):

See, I will bring them from the land  
of the north  
and gather them from the ends of  
the earth.

At that time "the land of the north" meant Assyria. In a sense the Israelites were gathered from "the ends of the earth" in the sixth century B.C. But how much more literally have these words been fulfilled in the twentieth century, in the return of Jews to Palestine!

In verse 9 we read:

They will come with weeping;  
they will pray as I bring them  
back.

The returning captives would weep tears of repentance and would pray as they came home. That was especially true after the captivity.



The Lord, who had scattered the Israelites, would now gather them and watch over them "like a shepherd" (v. 10). He would "ransom Jacob" and "redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they" (v. 11). There would be great rejoicing, with peace and prosperity (v. 12). Mourning would be turned into gladness (v. 13) and everyone's needs be fully met (v. 14).

### III. A FULFILLED PICTURE: Jeremiah 31:15

This verse is quoted in Matthew 2:18 and applied to the slaughter of the innocent babes at Bethlehem. But the words also had an application to the captivity period. Adam Clarke writes: "The Ramah mentioned here (for there were several towns of this name) was situated in the tribe of Benjamin, about six or seven miles from Jerusalem. Near this place Rachel was buried; who is here, in a beautiful figure of poetry, represented as coming out of her grave and lamenting bitterly for the loss of her children, none of whom presented themselves to her view, all being slain or gone into exile" (*Commentary*, p. 637).

In the application to the massacre at Bethlehem it is the descendants of Rachel, the mother of Benjamin, who are weeping over their lost children. As Clarke says, with probable justification, of the words here: "They were suitable to that occasion... but they are not a prediction of that event" (p. 637).

### IV. A REUNITED NATION: Jeremiah 31:16-28

The Lord declared, "There is hope for your future" and "Your children will return to their own land" (v. 17). The latter statement shows that the primary application of verse 15 is not to the massacre at Bethlehem, for the "children" here are obviously the captive Israelites.

Ephraim moans: "You disciplined me like an unruly calf" (v. 18). Ephraim

also says "After I strayed, I repented" (v. 19). That is why God could bring the captives back to their own land.

The divine reply (v. 20) is beautiful:

Is not Ephraim my dear son,  
the child in whom I delight?  
Though I often speak against him,  
I still remember him.  
Therefore my heart yearns for him;  
I have great compassion for him.

Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah will be planted again in their own land (v. 27). "Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, so I will watch over them to build and to plant" (v. 28).

The tide would turn. The outgoing captives would come back in. God promised it, and it did happen.

### V. A NEW COVENANT: Jeremiah 31:29-34

#### A. An Ancient Proverb: vv. 29-30

The fathers have eaten sour grapes,  
and the children's teeth are set on  
edge.

This is obviously a proverbial expression meaning that the children suffer for the sins of their parents. But God answers: "Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge" (v. 30).

Ezekiel quotes this same proverb (Ezek. 18:2). He words the divine answer thus: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (18:4). No one suffers eternally for someone else's sin.

Cheyne makes the following helpful comment on these two verses: "At first sight, it may seem as if Jeremiah opposes the second commandment, which describes how God 'visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children' (Exod. xx. 5). This, however, cannot really be, for he endorses this declaration later on (cf. xxxii. 18). The fact is that he is not so much condemning the proverb, as the



blasphemous application of it made by the Jews of his time. It is an eternal truth that sin perpetuates itself (except by the miracles of grace) in the children of transgressors, and intensified sin leads to intensified punishment. But the children of transgressors do not cease to be responsible for their own share in the sin;—this was the truth which Jeremiah's contemporaries ignored" ("Jeremiah," II, 14).

### B. A New Covenant: v. 31

The Lord declares through Jeremiah that the time is coming when He will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Again we find that these two groups, separated as a result of Solomon's sin, are to be reunited in God's plan for their joint future. Only God's inspired prophet could have foretold this with any degree of certainty.

### C. Not Like the Old Covenant: v. 32

It will not be like the covenant  
I made with their forefathers  
when I took them by the hand  
to lead them out of Egypt,  
because they broke my covenant,  
though I was a husband to them.

The reference, of course, is to the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. It was this covenant that

transformed a large group of ex-slaves into a unified nation. (We shall notice later how the new covenant differed from the old.)

### D. A Spiritual Covenant: v. 33

Now God describes the new covenant in graphic terms that never cease to challenge and inspire us:

I will put my law in their minds  
and write it on their hearts.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.

The old covenant, made at Sinai, consisted of numerous laws in the form of specific rules and regulations. Here we find the singular, "law." It is the law of love that God puts in our minds.

The old covenant consisted basically of the Ten Commandments, which were written on tablets of stone. The new law of love is written on our hearts. And the heart of the new covenant is that the Lord is our God, and we are His people. It is not just an agreement on paper; it is a new, spiritual relationship!

### E. A Covenant of Forgiveness: v. 34

It is not simply a new relationship, but a beautiful consciousness of this relationship: "They will all know me." True Christians have this glorious assurance in their hearts—the witness of the Spirit that He is ours and we are His. We don't have to be taught this by men; we know it in our hearts.

An essential element of this new covenant is the forgiveness it gives: "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sin no more." This glorious promise is the heritage of every true, born-again Christian. It is one of the greatest blessings that God gives us!

A proper understanding of the new covenant is so important that we take the liberty of giving a lengthy quotation from A. B. Bruce. He writes: "Whereas, in the case of the old, the law

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is it that brings real rest to our hearts?
2. How has God's everlasting love been shown in the case of Israel?
3. Of what is "Zion" a symbol?
4. Why should we be joyful Christians?
5. In what ways are the sins of fathers visited on their children?
6. What does it mean to have God's law written on our hearts?

of duty was written on *tablets of stone*, in the case of the new the law is to be written on the *heart*; whereas, under the old, owing to the ritual character of the worship, the knowledge of God and his will was a complicated affair, in which men generally were helplessly dependent on a professional class, under the new, the worship of God would be reduced to the simplest spiritual elements, and it would be in every man's power to know God at first hand, the sole requisite for such knowledge as would then be required being a

pure heart. Whereas, under the old, the provisions for the cancelling of sin were very unsatisfactory, and utterly unfit to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, by dealing thoroughly with the problem of guilt, under the new, God would grant to his people a real, absolute, and perennial forgiveness, so that the abiding relation between him and them should be as if sin had never existed" (*The Expositor*, January, 1880, pp. 70-71, quoted by Cheyne in *The Pulpit Commentary*, "Jeremiah," II, 14).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

W. F. Adeney gives some helpful points in applying the new covenant to ourselves. He says of this covenant: "Religion becomes more internal, spiritual, personal. . . . *Principles* take the place of outward ordinances. For a multitude of petty details, for a complication of rules, for a set of narrow

maxims, men are to have large principles in their hearts, such as truth, justice, purity, love to God, and love to man. This makes religion and morality more comprehensive, more deep, more real, and at the same time more free. *Affection* becomes the ruling motive" ("Jeremiah," II, 21).

October 26, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND EZRA

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Matthew 21:33-43

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and Ezra*

**Youth Topic:** *Living by God's Word*

**Background Scripture:** Nehemiah 8-9

**Scripture Lesson:** Nehemiah 8:3; 9:32-38

**Memory Verse:** *They read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.* Nehemiah 8:8

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Ezra Reads God's Law*

**Background Scripture:** Nehemiah 8-9

**Scripture Lesson:** Nehemiah 8:1-10

**Memory Verse:** *O God, thou art my God, I seek thee.* Psalm 63:1

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

Oct. 20 M.: Love for God's Word. Neh. 8:1-12

Oct. 21 T.: Learning from God's Word. Neh. 8:13-18

Oct. 22 W.: Confessing, a Part of Worship. Neh. 9:1-8

Oct. 23 T.: Remembering God's Loving Kindness. Neh. 9:9-21

Oct. 24 F.: God's Love and Patience. Neh. 9:22-31

Oct. 25 S.: A Resolve to Be Faithful. Neh. 9:32-38

Oct. 26 S.: "Thy Law Is My Delight." Ps. 119:169-176

LESSON AIM

To show the importance of reading God's Word and obeying its commands.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 434 B.C.

**Place:** Jerusalem

LESSON OUTLINE

**God's Covenant and Ezra**

**I. Reading the Law of God:** Nehemiah 8:1-8

A. The Assembly of the People: v. 1

B. Reading to the People: vv. 2-4

C. Reverent Worship: vv. 5-6

D. Interpreting the Word: vv. 7-8

**II. Reaction of the People:** Nehemiah 8:9-12

A. Weeping: v. 9

B. Rejoicing: vv. 10-12

**III. The Feast of Booths:** Nehemiah 8:13-18

**IV. Confession of Sin:** Nehemiah 9:1-6

**V. Rehearsal of History:** Nehemiah 9:7-31

**VI. Acknowledgment of God's Justice:** Nehemiah 9:32-35

A. Plea for Mercy: v. 32

B. Confession of Wrong: v. 33

C. Past Disobedience: vv. 34-35

**VII. Present Plight:** Nehemiah 9:36-37

A. Slaves in the Land: v. 36

B. In Great Distress: v. 37

**VIII. Binding Agreement:** Nehemiah 9:38

Last week we were studying Jeremiah, whose ministry lasted from 626 B.C. to 586 B.C., when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. This was followed by fifty years of captivity. The first captives returned to Judah in 536 B.C.

Someone may be asking, "Didn't Jeremiah predict seventy years of captivity?" That is right (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). The seventy years of captivity may be reckoned either from 606 B.C., when Daniel and others were taken to Babylon (Dan. 1:1-6), to 536 B.C., or from 586, when the temple was destroyed, to 516, when it was finally rebuilt.

There were three main deportations to Babylon: 606 B.C., 597 B.C. (II Chron. 36:9-10), and 586 B.C. (the main one). There were also three returns: 536 B.C., under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1-2, 64-65); 458 B.C., under Ezra (7:6-7); and 444 B.C., when Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls (Neh. 2:1-11).

Our lesson today apparently comes about ten years later. The walls of the holy city had been rebuilt (Neh. 6:15). The next thing that was desperately needed was a spiritual revival. And that was what Ezra brought about.

There is no more important topic for Christians to consider than that of living by God's Word.

The first essential, of course, is that we give our hearts to Christ; that we are born again, becoming God's children. But then we have to grow up in the family.

Every home has to have its rules if it is going to function smoothly and not be a chaos of confusion. The rules for God's family are found in the Bible. The only way we can be happy and successful in our Christian lives is to live by the Word.

This means that we must read the Bible daily, to find out what it wants to say to us. And we should always begin our Bible reading with a prayer that the Holy Spirit will interpret and apply the Word to our particular needs.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH



CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. When Ezra returned to Jerusalem he found spiritual life at a low ebb.
2. So he called the people together and read God's Word to them.
3. When the people heard the Word they wept over their sins.
4. A loving God quickly assured them of forgiveness.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. READING THE LAW OF GOD: Nehemiah 8:1-8

#### A. The Assembly of the People: v. 1

With the Israelites settled in their towns (7:73), "All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate." This was a convenient place near the temple. Then the people "told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel." Someone (we don't know who) had evidently shared with the people his concern that they should all hear the law of Moses. The implication is that during the captivity period the people had become ignorant of its contents.

#### B. Reading to the People: vv. 2-4

It was "the first day of the seventh month" (v. 2), which marked the beginning of the *civil* year for the Jews, as it still does today. The *religious* year began with the first month, in the middle of which the passover occurred. It must be remembered that the Jews had a lunar calendar. Their first month began in March and the seventh in September, roughly speaking.

Ezra is called "the scribe" in verse one and "the priest" in verse two. He came from a priestly family, but he was now functioning primarily as a scribe—that is, a teacher of the Law. In the time of Christ, partly because of the rivalry of the Pharisees and Sadducees, there was a sharp division between the scribes and priests.

Ezra brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women "and all who were able to understand"—that is the older, perhaps educated, children. Each book of the Law was a complete leather scroll, with the text written in Hebrew.

"He read it aloud from daybreak till noon" (v. 3), which made a rather long session, but they were making up for lost time. The fact that the people were willing to stay there for six hours shows how intensely interested they were in hearing God's Word again. "And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law." We must remember that all copies of Scripture books were handwritten, and so were too scarce and expensive for the people to have in their private possession. How different is the case today, when one can buy a copy of the whole Bible for the price of a meager meal, and then feed his soul on it the rest of his life!

"Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion" (v. 4). Beside him on the platform stood thirteen other men, who are all named but not otherwise identified. George Rawlinson comments: "These persons are commonly supposed to have been priests, but there is nothing to prove it. They need not even have been Levites, since they were not to teach, but only to do honour to Ezra" (*The Pulpit Commentary*, "Nehemiah," p. 80).

#### C. Reverent Worship: vv. 5-6

"Ezra opened the book" (v. 5)—that is, "unrolled the scroll." All the people

could see him because he was standing above them. Evidently the platform was at a considerable elevation. "And as he opened it, the people all stood up," out of reverence for the Word of God. Today people still stand during the public reading of Scripture.

"Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground" (v. 6). What a beautiful sight! The people's response to the presentation of God's Word was electrifying. Because Bibles are so common in our homes today, perhaps we have become too casual in our attitude toward Holy Scripture. We are not pleading for bibliolatry, but we are suggesting a proper reverence for the inspired Word of God.

#### D. Interpreting the Word: vv. 7-8

Thirteen Levites are named here, in addition to the other thirteen men. The platform must have been a sizable, solid structure. The Levites "instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there" (v. 7).

Then we are told more specifically, "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" (v. 8). The Law was written in Hebrew, but during the captivity the people had forgotten their Hebrew and were speaking Aramaic. The Levites were "translating" (NIV note) the Hebrew into Aramaic so that the people could understand. They evidently also gave the interpretation (meaning) of what was read.

## II. REACTION OF THE PEOPLE:

### Nehemiah 8:9-12

#### A. Weeping: v. 9

As the people listened to the words of the Law they were weeping. This was because they realized how tragically they and their forefathers had been breaking that law. These were evi-

dently tears of remorse, regret, and repentance. Again we see the people responding in a very appropriate manner. They certainly deserved to be comforted.

And they were! For "Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.'"

This was the first day of the seventh month (v. 2). In Leviticus 23:24 we read the Lord's instruction through Moses: "On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts." It was New Year's Day, a day of celebration and the blowing of trumpets—not of weeping.

#### B. Rejoicing: vv. 10-12

Nehemiah told the people: "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve." Then he added a very significant statement, one that we often quote today: "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (v. 10).

Evidently it was hard for the people to stop their weeping. For we read that the Levites "calmed the people," telling them: "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve" (v. 11).

Obediently "the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy" (v. 12). A sad day had become a glad day.

## III. THE FEAST OF BOOTHS:

### Nehemiah 8:13-18

On the second day the heads of families gathered for a further reading of the Law (v. 13). How ignorant of the Law they were is shown by the fact that they "found" written in the Law "that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month" (v. 14). Verse 15 indicates that they were now reading from the Book of Leviticus (23:33-43).

So the people brought branches and built booths on their roofs and in their courtyards, as one can still see in Jewish yards during the fall Feast of Tabernacles. And each day the Law was read publicly (v. 18).

#### IV. CONFESSION OF SIN: Nehemiah 9:1-6

"On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads" (v. 1). These were the three regular signs of grief and mourning. The reading of the Law had really affected the people deeply, and they showed it.

"They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers" (v. 2). Every true spiritual revival in history has been marked by genuine repentance and confession of sin.

"They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day, and spent another fourth in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God" (v. 3). It is the Word of God, applied by the Holy Spirit, that produces real repentance. We have here the essential ingredients of genuine revival.

The worship of the people is beautifully expressed in verses 5 and 6: "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. . . . You give life to everything, and multitudes of heaven worship you." The people of earth were worshiping Him too!

#### V. REHEARSAL OF HISTORY: Nehemiah 9:7-31

The exulting Levites, in praising the Lord for His goodness, reached back in history to the time of Abraham (vv. 7-8). Then they dwelt for some time on the miracle of the exodus from Egypt (vv. 9-12). Next came the giving of the law at Sinai, and the provision of food and water (vv. 13-15).

In spite of all this, that first generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt "became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands" (v. 16). "They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them" (v. 17). Certainly God would have been justified in abandoning them! "But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them," even when they made the golden calf at Sinai (vv. 17-18).

The historical recital continued through the conquest of Canaan (vv. 22-25) to their repeated apostasies during the period of the judges (vv. 26-27). Arrogance, disobedience, and stubborn rebellion marked even the kingdom period (vv. 29-31). Certainly their punishment was all deserved.

#### VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S JUSTICE: Nehemiah 9:32-35

##### A. Plea for Mercy: v. 32

"Now therefore, O our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, upon our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today."

The opening words of this verse form a close parallel to the beginning of Nehemiah's prayer as recorded in 1:5. It is the proper kind of attitude for approaching God. The more we are conscious of His greatness and love, the more comfort and confidence we feel in His marvelous care.

The reference to the "kings of Assyria" at the close of this verse is significant. Rawlinson says: "The kings of Assyria, in the strictest sense of the word, had been God's original instrument for punishing his rebellious people. A king not mentioned in Holy Scripture tells us



that he defeated Ahab, and forced Jehu to pay him tribute. Another (Pul) took tribute from Menahem (2 Kings vx. 19, 20). A third (Tiglath-Pileser) carried two tribes and a half into captivity (*ibid.* ver. 29; 1 Chron. v. 26). A fourth (Shalmaneser) laid siege to Samaria (2 Kings xvii. 5), and a fifth (Sargon) took it. A sixth (Sennacherib) took all the fenced cities of Judah from Hezekiah, and forced him to buy the safety of Jerusalem (*ibid.* ch. xviii. 13-16). A seventh (Esar-haddon) had Manasseh brought as a prisoner to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11). Hence Isaiah calls the Assyrian monarch 'the rod of God's anger' (Isa. x. 5) ("Nehemiah," p. 95). The Assyrians were very cruel in their treatment of conquered nations. And the Babylonians had also been harsh. Now the Israelites plead that God will not overlook all this but will have mercy.

### B. Confession of Wrong: v. 33

The suffering people acknowledge: "In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong." This was a very commendable attitude on their part. They were not blaming God, but taking the blame on themselves. Unfortunately, this was not always the attitude of God's people in times of trouble.

Probably Ezra and the other Levites who helped him were partly responsible for this fair, honest confession of wrong. As they explained the Law that was read, they doubtless pointed out the fact that God was just keeping His promises. He had said over and over again that if they disobeyed His commandments He would have to punish them. As a holy God, He had to be a God of justice as well as mercy.

### C. Past Disobedience: vv. 34-35

"Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow your law; they paid no attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them.

Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways."

The books of Kings and Chronicles give abundant documentation for the truth of these two verses. We have already noticed how miserably Solomon failed in the end. His son Rehoboam was wicked and wilful. In the northern kingdom, Jeroboam led the nation into idolatry. There were very few good kings in the northern kingdom of Israel, and pitifully few in the southern kingdom of Judah.

For the kings of the north we find almost a monotonous refrain: "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD" (I Kings 15:26, 34, 16:30; II Kings 13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:8; 18:24, 28; 17:2). We even find it for some kings of Judah (II Kings 8:18, 27).

It is no wonder that God had to send both these kingdoms into captivity for the sins of their rulers and people. He had carefully warned them, but they paid no attention.

## VII. PRESENT PLIGHT:

### Nehemiah 9:36-37

#### A. Slaves in the Land: v. 36

"But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we get people to read the Bible more?
2. What place does confession have in the Christian life?
3. How can we bring about greater reverence in public worship?
4. How may new versions help to make God's Word more clear?
5. How is God's justice shown today?
6. What covenant should we make with God?



and the other things it produces." The captives had been allowed to return to their own country by the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia (II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). But they were still under Persian rule, not free men. This was a galling fact for God's people to have to live with.

### B. In Great Distress: v. 37

"Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress." The Persian kings exacted a heavy tribute, which took the profits away from the Israelites, just as did the Roman Empire in the time of Christ. They rule over "our bodies." This may be a reference to the Persian (and Roman) custom of impressing into service any bystander they wanted. The returned captives felt that they were "in great distress"—physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

## VIII. BINDING AGREEMENT:

### Nehemiah 9:38

"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it." God had made covenants with His people, but they had broken them. Now they take the initiative in making a covenant with God.

The terms of the covenant are spelled out in 10:30-39. It was a solemn agreement. They "bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our God" (10:29).

The returning captives had at least faced up to their responsibility to obey God's law if they expected to continue in the land. They did remain there for about five hundred years. But in A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans and the rebellious Jews were again scattered.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Once more we see the importance of proper leaders. Ezra the priest and scribe, supported by Nehemiah the civil governor, brought about a reform in Israel that held the nation together for several centuries.

What our world sorely needs today is religious leaders of Ezra's caliber and

civil leaders like Nehemiah—honest and courageous. We have too many politicians who are weak or wicked, selfish or even sensual, concerned only for their own interests, and with no moral convictions. The result is what we see on television and read in our newspapers. May God come to our aid!

November 2, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND JESUS CHRIST

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Hebrews 6:1-12

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and Jesus Christ*

**Youth Topic:** *New Covenant in Christ*

**Background Scripture:** Luke 4:16-30; John 13:31-35; Mark 14:22-25

**Scripture Lesson:** Luke 4:16-21; Mark 14:22-25

**Memory Verse:** *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* John 13:35

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Christ, God's Promised One*

**Background Scripture:** Luke 4:16-30; John 13:31-35

**Scripture Lesson:** Mark 14:23-25; Luke 4:16-21

**Memory Verse:** *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* John 13:35

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

Oct. 27 M.: A Covenant Needed. Gen. 3:9-15

Oct. 28 T.: A Renewed Covenant. Exod. 6:1-8

Oct. 29 W.: The Covenant Is Secure. II Sam. 23:1-5

Oct. 30 T.: God's Promise to His People. Ps. 147:1-11

Oct. 31 F.: God's Son Is Confirmed. Mark 1:1-11

Nov. 1 S.: The Living Covenant Is Coming. Isa. 61:1-3

Nov. 2 S.: The Living Covenant. Luke 4:16-30

LESSON AIM

To increase our appreciation of God's covenant with us through Christ Jesus.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about A.D. 27-30

**Place:** Nazareth and Jerusalem

LESSON OUTLINE

**God's Covenant and Jesus Christ**

**I. The Prophecy of Isaiah:** Luke 4:16-19

A. Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth: v. 16

B. Unrolling the Scroll: v. 17

C. Reading from Isaiah: vv. 18-19

**II. The Prophecy Fulfilled:** Luke 4:20-22

A. An Attentive Audience: v. 20

B. A Startling Statement: v. 21

C. A Surprised Audience: v. 22

**III. Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth:** Luke 4:23-30

- A. Attitude of the People: v. 23
- B. An Uncomfortable Reminder: vv. 24-27
- C. Murderous Hatred: vv. 28-30

**IV. Institution of the Lord's Supper:** Mark 14:22-25

- A. The Symbol of Christ's Body: v. 22
- B. The Symbol of Christ's Blood: vv. 23-24
- C. The Coming Kingdom: v. 25

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

Our general topic for this quarter is "God's Covenant with His People." We have spent eight weeks studying the old covenant as recorded in the Old Testament. Today we turn to the New Testament and begin a new unit of lessons: "The New Covenant in Jesus Christ." The topic of today's lesson is God's covenant and Jesus Christ.

We should begin this unit of study with even keener enthusiasm. For *we* are under this new covenant, which God has made with all those who will accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

How fortunate we are! We have a new covenant in Christ. What a privilege it is to be born in this age of grace!

In a recent lesson we studied Jeremiah's revelation of the new covenant (Jer. 31). We saw that it was not a legalistic one but a spiritual one.

In the upper room the night before His crucifixion Jesus inaugurated the Lord's Supper as the institution of the new covenant in Christ. Young people may feel a little strange as they partake of the Communion elements. But if we will meditate on the meaning of Christ's body and blood, given for us and our salvation, the Communion service can be a high spiritual experience. Let's make it so!

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. Jesus calls us all to follow Him.
2. This means that we must accept His plan for our lives.
3. Sharing in the Lord's Supper can be a blessing to us.
4. But we must think of its *spiritual* meaning.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

**I. THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH:**

Luke 4:16-19

**A. Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth: v. 16**

"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom." The Jewish Sabbath,

we must remember, was from sunset Friday night to sunset Saturday. So this was Saturday morning.

Jesus set us the example of regular weekly attendance at a worship service. For us it means going to church every Sunday morning to worship the Lord.

The term *synagogue* comes directly from the Greek word, which was compounded of *syn*, "together," and *ago*,

"lead" or "gather." So *synagogue* meant a gathering together. It was used primarily for the congregation and secondarily for the building in which the congregation met for worship. Our word *church* has the same twofold meaning.

Jesus was brought up in a godly home where regular attendance at worship was the rule. As parents we should see that our homes are the same.

"And he stood up to read." Unlike our traditional church services today, different people read the Scripture lesson. (This is taking place more frequently now, even in Roman Catholic churches.) Alfred Plummer says here: "Christ's standing up indicated that He had been asked to read, or was ready to do so. This is the only occasion on which we are told that Jesus read" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 119).

Plummer gives this helpful description of a typical synagogue service: "The lectern was close to the front seats, where those who were most likely to be called upon to read commonly sat. A lesson from the Torah or Law was read first, and then one from the Prophets. After the lesson had been read in Hebrew it was interpreted into Aramaic (Neh. viii. 8), or into Greek in places where Greek was commonly spoken. This was done verse by verse in the Law; but in the Prophets three verses might be taken at once, and in this case Jesus seems to have taken two verses. Then followed the exposition or sermon. The reader, interpreter, and preacher might be one, two, or three persons. Here Jesus was both reader and preacher; possibly He interpreted as well. Although there were officers with fixed duties attached to each synagogue, yet there was no one specially appointed either to read, or interpret, or preach, or pray. Any member of the congregation might discharge these duties; and probably those who were competent discharged them in turn at the invitation of the *archisynagogos* (Acts xiii. 15 . . .). Hence it was always

easy for Jesus to address the congregation. When He became famous as a teacher He would often be invited to do so" (*Luke*, p. 119). It should be noted that the previous verse (15) says that Jesus "taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him."

## B. Unrolling the Scroll: v. 17

"The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it was written." Isaiah is one of the longer books of the Old Testament, and so the scroll was a sizable one to handle. The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, which I have seen several times in Jerusalem, is twenty-four feet long. For many years it was on display in a specially constructed, cave-like room underground, called "The Shrine of the Book." Due to the danger of deterioration, it has now been packed away in darkness. But one could formerly see the entire scroll, unwound around a large circular display case—a very impressive sight. Incidentally, the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah is dated by paleographers at about 125 B.C., a thousand years older than the oldest Hebrew scroll of Isaiah previously known.

We cannot be certain whether the following passage from Isaiah was the regularly scheduled reading for that day, or whether Jesus chose it himself. Henry Alford comments: "It is doubtful whether the Rabbinical cycle of Sabbath readings, or lessons from the law and prophets, were as yet in use: but some regular plan was adopted; and according to that plan, after the reading of the law, which always preceded, the portion of the prophets came to be read (see Acts xiii. 15), which, for that sabbath, fell in the prophet Isaiah. The roll containing that book (probably, that alone) was given to the Lord. But it does not appear that He read any part of the lesson for the day; but when He had unrolled the scroll, *found . . . the passage which follows*" (*The Greek Testament*, I, 478). This seems to be a very fair putting of the case.



### C. Reading from Isaiah: vv. 18-19

These two verses are quoted from Isaiah 61:1, 2. As is usual in the New Testament, they are quoted (somewhat freely) from the Septuagint (Greek) version, which was finished in the second century B.C. (the same century as the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah). Here the Septuagint differs slightly from the standard Hebrew text.

What was the setting of this passage? Plummer expresses it well: "In the original the Prophet puts into the mouth of Jehovah's ideal Servant a gracious message to those in captivity, promising them release and a return to the restored Jerusalem, the joy of which is compared to the joy of the year of jubilee. It is obvious that both figures, the return from exile and the release at the jubilee, admirably express Christ's work of redemption" (*Luke*, p. 121).

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me." Plummer comments: "In applying these words to Himself the Christ looks back to His baptism. He is more than a Prophet; He is 'the Son, the Beloved One,' of Jehovah (iii. 21, 22)" (*Luke*, p. 121). It was there that Jesus was anointed with the Spirit to preach.

Jesus declared that He was anointed "to preach good news to the poor." The Greek word for "poor" is *ptochos*, which comes from the verb *ptosso*, "I crouch." So it suggests abject poverty. It is interesting to note, as Plummer does, that this noun "always had a bad meaning until it was ennobled by the Gospels" (*Luke*, p. 121). The sophisticated Greeks tended to despise the poor; Jesus loved them and ministered to them.

When John the Baptist in prison sent messengers to inquire of Jesus whether He was really the Messiah, the Master included in his reply; "The good news is preached to the poor." This was one of the proofs of His Messianic role.

The next three lines suggest three aspects of the spiritual deliverance that Christ came to bring. Sinners are prisoners, blind and oppressed. Only Christ can set the sinner free.

Jesus ended His reading with the

line: "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." But that is right in the middle of a sentence in Isaiah. Why did He stop there?

The answer is obvious. If He had read the next line—"and the day of vengeance of our God"—He could not have made the statement we find in verse 21. No, "the day of vengeance of our God" will be at His second coming. But He came the first time, nearly two thousand years ago, to bring in "the year of the Lord's favor," what is called elsewhere "the day of salvation"—the time when God welcomes, or accepts, those who believe in Christ as their Savior.

Plummer observes that the expression means "The age of the Messiah, which is Jehovah's time for bestowing great blessings on His people" (*Luke*, p. 122).

## II. THE PROPHECY FULFILLED: Luke 4:20-22

### A. An Attentive Audience: v. 20

"Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down." It was not a book to be "closed," but a scroll to be "rolled up." He gave it to the synagogue attendant, who put it back in its place. Then Jesus "sat down." The Jewish custom was to stand while reading the sacred Scriptures, but sit while expounding them. Jesus simply followed the custom of His day.

"The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him." There was something electrifying in the atmosphere. Doubtless the reverent, forceful way He read the Scripture gripped the audience. Whenever we read the Bible in public we should give people the impression that we realize we are reading God's Word. We have sometimes heard Scripture read in public rapidly and carelessly, as if it were the newspaper.

### B. A Startling Statement: v. 21

Now that He had the rapt attention of His audience, Jesus made a startling

announcement: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." He was filling the role described in this passage in Isaiah. He was doing all the things foretold by the prince of prophets seven centuries earlier. In Him, the Messiah, God was ministering to needy people as Isaiah had predicted He would. Of course, the divine inspiration of the prophet guaranteed that his predictions would come true.

### C. A Surprised Audience: v. 22

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked." This verse indicates that the brief statement in verse 21 was only the beginning of His message—a fact which is implied in "began to say" (v. 21). How long He spoke we do not know.

The initial reaction of the audience was one of approval, amazement, and perplexity. How could "Joseph's son," the village carpenter, speak such gracious words?

## III. REJECTION OF JESUS AT NAZARETH: Luke 4:23-30

### A. Attitude of the People: v. 23

We have noted in the previous verse what the initial reaction of the people was. But Jesus' words here indicate that His hearers wanted Him to perform some miracles right then and there, such as they had heard he did in Capernaum. Why not minister to his own home town?

### B. An Uncomfortable Reminder: vv. 24-27

Jesus stated a well-known truth: "No prophet is accepted in his home town" (v. 24). Then He reminded the people that "there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time" (v. 25). "Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon" (v. 26). "And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was

cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian" (v. 27). In other words, God bypassed people in Israel and had His prophets minister to needy Gentiles. The point Jesus was making is that God loves people of all nationalities and backgrounds.

### C. Murderous Hatred: vv. 28-30

We are reminded of what happened later in Jerusalem when Paul, speaking to a crowd of Jews in the temple area, said that God told him to go to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). Immediately the people shouted: "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" (v. 22).

The same reaction took place here in the synagogue at Nazareth. When Jesus reminded his fellow townsmen of God's love for Gentiles, "All the people in the synagogue were furious" (v. 28). They rushed Him out of the synagogue and drove Him out of town, planning to throw him down the nearby cliff (v. 29). "But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way" (v. 30). Adam Clarke suggests: "Either He shut their eyes so that they could not see Him or He so overawed them by His power as to leave them no strength to perform their murderous purpose" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 863). I prefer the latter explanation.

In their parallel passages Matthew (13:58) and Mark (6:5) say that Jesus

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important that we attend church regularly?
2. What should be the place of Scripture reading in the Sunday morning service?
3. How did Jesus fulfill the Isaiah passage?
4. Why did the people of Nazareth not believe in Him?
5. What is the purpose of the Communion service?
6. How can we get the most out of it?

could not do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

#### IV. INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER:

Mark 14:22-25

##### A. The Symbol of Christ's Body: v. 22

It was at the close of the Last Supper in the upper room the night before Jesus was crucified. The Master had just announced that one of His disciples was going to betray Him (vv. 18-21). Apparently Judas Iscariot left the room at this point (John 13:21-30). Jesus was now alone with His eleven loyal apostles.

Now He "took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.'"

Jesus did not mean that the bread was *actually* His physical body, for He was alive in His body at the moment. Clearly He meant, "This represents my body." That is, the bread in the Communion service is a symbol of Christ's body given for us on the cross. As we partake of the bread, we are to think of Him dying for us at Calvary to save us. And we are, by faith, to partake of His spiritual life, making it our own life.

##### B. The Symbol of Christ's Blood: vv. 23-24

"Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it" (v. 23). There was a common sharing of the cup He offered.

Jesus then said to His disciples: "This is my blood of the covenant [the oldest Greek manuscripts do not say "new covenant"] which is poured out for many" (v. 24). Again we note that this language has to be symbolical. At that moment His own physical blood was coursing through His veins.

When we take the cup at the Communion service we should think of Christ's blood poured out at the cross in order to purchase our redemption and give us cleansing from sin (I John 1:7). So there should be a sense of purifying that comes to us at the Lord's Supper.

##### C. The Coming Kingdom: v. 25

Henry Alford gives a beautiful quotation: "Every celebration of the Lord's Supper is a foretaste and prophetic anticipation of the *great Marriage Supper* which is prepared for the Church at the second appearing of Christ" (*The Greek Testament*, I, 269).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The closing verse of this lesson sounds a very significant note. Someone has said: "The Lord's Supper points not only to the past, but to the future also. It has not only a commemorative, but also a prophetic meaning. In it we have not only to show forth the Lord's death *until He come*, but we have also to *think of the time when He shall come* to celebrate his holy Supper with His own,

new, in his Kingdom of Glory" (quoted in Alford, *The Greek Testament*, I, 269).

This gives an entirely new dimension to the Communion service. It is not only looking *back* to Christ's death at Calvary, but looking *forward* to our reunion with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

November 9, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND PETER

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

I Thessalonians 4:1-12

**Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and Peter*

**Youth Topic:** *Life's New Dimension*

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Background Scripture:** Acts 2-3

**Scripture Lesson:** Acts 2:14-17; 3:18-26

**Memory Verse:** *And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. . . .* Acts 2:17

**Topic:** *Peter Reminds the People of God's Promise*

**Background Scripture:** Acts 2-3

CHILDREN

**Scripture Lesson:** Acts 3:18-26

**Memory Verse:** *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*  
II Corinthians 9:15

Nov. 3 M.: Peter Encounters Jesus. John 1:35-42

Nov. 4 T.: A True Confession. Matt. 16:13-19

Nov. 5 W.: A Mountaintop Experience. Matt. 17:1-8

Nov. 6 T.: A Promise to Be Broken. Mark 14:26-31

Nov. 7 F.: A False Confession. Matt. 26:69-75

Nov. 8 S.: Peter's Challenge. John 21:15-19

Nov. 9 S.: Peter Proclaims. Acts 2:14-17

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

LESSON AIM

To help us see more clearly the plan of God for this age.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** June, A.D. 30

**Place:** Jerusalem

**God's Covenant and Peter**

**I. Outpouring of the Spirit:** Acts 2:1-13

A. Disciples Filled with the Spirit: vv. 1-4

B. Perplexed Crowd: vv. 5-12

C. Some Mockers: v. 13

LESSON OUTLINE

**II. Peter's Explanation:** Acts 2:14-17

A. Addressing the Crowd: v. 14

B. Not Drunkenness: v. 15

C. Prophecy of Joel: vv. 16-18

**III. Healing of the Crippled Beggar:** Acts 3:1-10



**IV. Peter's Explanation: Acts 3:11-16****V. The Role of the Messiah: Acts 3:17-23**

- A. Ignorance of the Jews: v. 17
- B. A Suffering Messiah: v. 18
- C. The Call to Repentance: v. 19
- D. The Coming Messiah: vv. 20-21
- E. The Promised Prophet: v. 22
- F. The Need for Obedience: v. 23

**VI. The Promised Messiah: Acts 3:24-26**

- A. Predicted by All the Prophets: v. 24
- B. Heirs of the Covenant: v. 25
- C. A Saving Messiah: v. 26

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

The church of Jesus Christ was born on the day of Pentecost. And what a healthy birth it was! On that very day three thousand people were converted and became members of the body of Christ. The church was born alive!

What was the secret? The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples in the upper room. Without that we would not hear of converts that day and the spread of the gospel around the Mediterranean world. It all happened because the first followers of Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is the greatest need of the church today. A Spirit-filled, Spirit-directed, Spirit-empowered ministry is the only thing that will meet the need of a sin-sick world. In such a day as this we need fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

What is life's new dimension? Our lesson today gives a clear answer: It is the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Being filled with the Spirit transformed Peter from a cowardly weakling into a courageous witness. It changed his blundering ignorance into keen spiritual understanding. The frightened disowner of Jesus became the powerful preacher on the day of Pentecost, with three thousand people converted to Christ at the close of his sermon.

What all of us need to do is to surrender our hearts completely to Christ, to let Him fill us with His Spirit and make us what He wants us to be. Not all of us are called to preach. But we are all called to witness (Acts 1:8). It must have taken all the 120 who were filled with the Spirit in the upper room to counsel with the three thousand who came to Christ! God has a place for all of us to fill.

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. God speaks to us today through His Holy Spirit.
2. We should learn to listen to the Spirit.
3. God's gift of Jesus was the fulfillment of His covenant.
4. The first thing the Spirit does is to convict us of sin.
5. He then asks us to repent and believe in Jesus.
6. If we obey the Spirit, we are saved.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT:

Acts 2:1-13

#### A. Disciples Filled with the Spirit: vv. 1-4

After His resurrection Jesus told His disciples, most of whom were from Galilee, to stay in Jerusalem until they were "clothed with power from on High" (Luke 24:49). In Acts 1:5 he said to them, "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So 120 disciples (Acts 1:15) obediently waited in the upper room.

And their waiting was rewarded. On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection (*Pentecost* means "fiftieth"), suddenly they heard "a sound like the blowing of a violent wind." Then they saw "what seemed to be tongues of fire." They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began "to speak in other tongues."

So there were three accompanying signs when they were filled with the Spirit. The wind symbolized *power*, the fire *purity*, and the tongues *proclamation*. But these were attention-getters, like the divine pyrotechnic display at the giving of the law at Sinai. It is significant that the Jews claimed their Feast of Pentecost commemorated that earlier event (Exod. 19:16-20:18).

#### B. Perplexed Crowd: vv. 5-12

In Jerusalem at that time were "God-fearing Jews from every nation of the world" (v. 5). Since the Mediterranean Sea was unsafe for sailing from November to March, the Jews from the outlying provinces of the Roman Empire could not easily come to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover (when the Palestinian Jews came in large numbers). They waited for the calm seas in June, and then came for the Feast of Weeks (Greek name, *Pentecost*).

"When they heard this sound" (v. 6)—we do not know whether this was

the roar of verse 2 or the speaking in tongues of verse 4—a large crowd gathered "in bewilderment." Why? "Because each one heard them speaking in his own language." The Greek word is *dialectos*, which we have taken as *dialect*. But in the Greek it simply means language.

The people were amazed because the speakers were Galileans (v. 7), and the Galileans were not considered well-educated. They asked: "Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?" (v. 8). Again the Greek has *dialectos*. There is no good reason for the King James Version to use "tongues" here.

In verse 11 the people said, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues." Here the Greek has the word *glossa*, as in verse 4. These people from fifteen different language areas (vv. 9-11) heard the Spirit-filled disciples talking to them in their own specific languages. *Glossa* and *dialectos* are used interchangeably in this passage, so the speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost was not talking in "unknown tongues" but speaking in known, intelligible foreign languages of that day.

#### C. Some Mockers: v. 13

"Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'" One is reminded of Paul's admonition: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The spirit-filled believers on the day of Pentecost were so overflowing with joy and enthusiasm that some thought they must be drunk.

### II. PETER'S EXPLANATION:

Acts 2:14-17

#### A. Addressing the Crowd: v. 14

Peter was the natural spokesman for the twelve apostles. He "stood up,

... raised his voice and addressed the crowd."

The three Greek verbs in this verse emphasize that Peter did three things: (1) stood up; (2) spoke up; (3) spoke out. That should be a lesson to all of us when we speak in public. There is nothing much more distressing in a public meeting than to have someone mumbling in a low voice that very few can hear.

Peter was a Jew, so he began, "Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem." The latter would be Gentiles who were devout worshipers in the Jewish synagogues. Then he offered to explain the meaning of what had happened, adding: "Listen carefully to what I say."

### B. Not Drunkenness: v. 15

John Wesley had the habit of beginning his sermons with a negative introduction, in which he disposed of misconceptions his audience might have. That is what we find Peter doing here. The disciples were not drunk, for "It's only nine in the morning!"—too early to get drunk. Furthermore, pious Jews did not eat or drink before 9:00 a.m., the first hour of prayer.

### C. Prophecy of Joel: vv. 16-18

What was it, then? Peter proceeded to tell. He said, "No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (v. 16). Then in verses 17-21, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32a.

Both the Hebrew and the Septuagint of Joel begin by saying, "After these things." But Peter interpreted this as meaning "in the last days"—that is, the days of the Messiah, as the Jews correctly interpreted it. We find this expression, "in the last days," used in II Timothy 3:1 and II Peter 3:3 for the last days of the present age, before the second coming of Christ. But in the larger, Old Testament sense the phrase applies to the whole messianic age, beginning with Christ's first coming. This is shown by the fact that Peter, referring to what was actually taking place on the day of

Pentecost, says, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (v. 16). The "last days" indicate the time of God's final dealing with mankind in the light of Jesus' redemptive work.

"I will pour out my Spirit on all people." Both the Hebrew and the Greek say, "all flesh." R. J. Knowling comments: "That is, all men; but this expression in itself suggests a contrast between the weakness and imperfection of humanity and the all-powerful working of the divine Spirit." Knowling goes on to say; "In Joel's prophecy the expression only included the people of Israel, although the divine Spirit should be no longer limited to particular prophets or favoured individuals, but should be given to the whole nation" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, II, 78-79). But in the New Testament "all flesh" means "all mankind" (NASB). There is now no distinction in God's sight, of race, nationality, color, or sex.

That the last statement is correct is shown by the next line: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy." It should be noted first of all that *prophesy* in the New Testament does not mean "predict" but "preach."

Women preachers? Yes, women preachers! Except for the Dark Ages of Roman Catholicism, the church has always had them. In fact, when Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, he stayed for several days at the home of Philip the evangelist in Caesarea. And this man had four daughters who preached. I personally know of several godly women preachers who have won thousands of people to Christ through their ministries.

Then we are told that the "young men will see visions" and the "old men will dream dreams." These are two ways—visions and dreams—that God spoke to people in Old Testament times, and as recorded in the early pages of the New Testament. But since Pentecost He has spoken, for the most part, directly to people's hearts by the Holy Spirit.

There is another interesting point



right here: young men should see *visions* of the future for their lives and the work of the kingdom, and old men appropriately dream *dreams* of the past. So let it be!

On God's servants, both men and women, "I will pour out my Spirit" (v. 18). And again we are told that "they [both men and women] will prophesy." It is evident that where the Holy Spirit is really present in the church, this will happen.

### III. HEALING OF THE CRIPPLED BEGGAR:

Acts 3:1-10

"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon" (v. 1). The Jews had two times of prayer, nine in the morning (2:15) and three in the afternoon, in connection with the morning and evening daily sacrifices. It is interesting to note that the believers continued to participate in these times of prayer at the temple, even after Pentecost (cf. 2:46).

On this particular day they found at "the temple gate called Beautiful" (v. 2) a man crippled from birth. He asked for money (v. 3). When Peter said, "Look at us!" he expected a bountiful gift (vv. 4-5).

Peter did not give the man what he wanted (money) but what he needed (health). Now he could work and earn his own living.

The man went into the temple courts, "walking and jumping, and praising God" (v. 8). He had a right to celebrate.

### IV. PETER'S EXPLANATION:

Acts 3:11-16

The people in the temple courts came running together to Solomon's Colonnade, inside the east wall of the outer court. When Peter saw he had a crowd, he preached. That was just like Peter!

He said some important things.

Again he started with the negative approach: "Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" (v. 12). No, not *us*, but *God!*

It was "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," who had "glorified his servant Jesus" (v. 13). Some people are bothered by the use of "servant" (NASB, NIV) instead of "Son" (KJV), as if the deity of Jesus was in question. The Greek word *pais* can mean either, but most scholars feel that the reference here is to the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 52-53.

Peter brought a very serious charge against the Jews of his day: "You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer [Barabbas] be released to you" (v. 14). That is what every sinner does when he rejects Jesus and holds on to sin.

Peter concluded by asserting: "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong" (v. 16). It was Jesus who healed him.

### V. THE ROLE OF THE MESSIAH-Acts 3:17-23

#### A. Ignorance of the Jews: v. 17

Mercifully Peter went on to say: "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders" (v. 17). What was their ignorance?

#### B. A Suffering Messiah: v. 18

"But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer." The Jews expected their Messiah to come in glory and set up a political kingdom on earth. Their eyes were blinded so that they did not see that the prophets taught (for instance in Isaiah 52-53) that the Messiah would be the Suffering Servant of the Lord. This is still a stumbling block in the way of Jews accepting Jesus as their Messiah.

Psalm 22 is another significant Scripture. It should be remembered



that David, the author, is called "a prophet" (Acts 2:30). This psalm describes death by crucifixion (vv. 16-18), which was practiced not by the Jews but by the Romans. So there were Old Testament prophecies, though somewhat veiled, that pointed forward to the sufferings of the Messiah.

### C. The Call to Repentance: v. 19

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out." The note of repentance is sounded over and over again, in both the Old Testament and the New. It means turning away from our sins and turning toward God. Repentance is an essential requirement for receiving the forgiveness of our sins.

### D. The Coming Messiah: vv. 20-21

"And that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you [so the best Greek text] even Jesus" (v. 20). Jesus is God's appointed Messiah and Savior for us.

"He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (v. 21). There has been a great deal of discussion in com-

mentaries as to what is meant by this restoration of all things. Adam Clarke and others have applied it to the spiritual restoration that comes to us as individuals. But the first part of the verse seems to indicate definitely that it refers to the time of Christ's second coming.

Here we find a parallel in Jesus' words: "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne . . ." (Matt. 19:28). The reference is to the millennial kingdom at the close of this age. There may also be an allusion to the same thing in Romans 8:18-21.

### E. The Promised Prophet: v. 22

The quotation is from Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, 19. In Acts 7:37 Stephen also quoted this Old Testament passage and applied it to Christ. The first application was obviously to Moses' successor, Joshua. But the complete, final application was to Jesus. This is what we call "the telescopic principle of prophecy"—a nearer, partial fulfillment in the general time of the prophet and a later, complete fulfillment in Christ. It is essential that we recognize both.

### F. The Need for Obedience: v. 23

"Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people." This was partially true in relation to Joshua, but it is completely true in relation to Christ.

## VI. THE PROMISED MESSIAH:

Acts 3:24-26

### A. Predicted by All the Prophets: v. 24

Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of a long succession of prophets. There were individual prophets before that at scattered intervals, but beginning with Samuel we had prophets continuously, and they all "foretold these days" of the Messiah.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What might have happened if the disciples had failed to obey Christ's command to tarry for the Spirit (Luke 24:49)?
2. How can we be filled with the Spirit?
3. What did Jesus say would happen as a result of being filled with the Spirit (Acts 1:8)?
4. What place do women have in all this?
5. Is our lack of witness due to lack of the Spirit?
6. What is the real secret of power in the church?

**B. Heirs of the Covenant: v. 25**

Peter declared: "And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers." Outstanding was His covenant with Abraham: "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed." The term *offspring*, of course, refers primarily to Jesus Christ, as Paul pointedly tells us (Gal. 3:16). Through Him "all peoples on earth" have been richly blessed, by His

provision of salvation for all mankind.

**C. A Saving Messiah: v. 26**

"When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from his wicked ways." Jesus' post-resurrection ministry was entirely to Jews; He came to them "first." But His followers carried the gospel to the Gentiles.

**CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

George Mueller, the great man of faith of Bristol, England, wrote on his ninetieth birthday; "I was converted in November, 1825, but I only came into the full surrender of the heart four years later, in July, 1829. The love of money was gone, the love of place was gone, the love of position was gone, the love of worldly pleasures was gone. God, God alone, became my portion." And then he added: "After I was filled

with the Spirit, I learned more about the Scriptures in four hours than I had learned in the previous four years" (Quoted in *Flame*, Sept.-Oct., 1968). The result is that George Mueller stands as one of the greatest heroes of faith of all time. Without ever asking people for a penny of money, simply presenting the needs to God, he housed and fed thousands of orphans every year.

November 16, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND PAUL

DEVOTIONAL READING	Acts 26:9-18
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>God's Covenant and Paul</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Sharing God's Good News</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Acts 13:13-52; II Corinthians 3:1-6</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Acts 13:44-52</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.</i> Acts 13:47</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>Preaching Partners Share the Good News</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Acts 13:13-52</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Acts 13:44-48</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.</i> John 3:16</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p><b>Nov. 10 M.:</b> From Darkness to Light. Acts 9:1-9, 19-22</p> <p><b>Nov. 11 T.:</b> A Time for Living. Gal. 2:16-20</p> <p><b>Nov. 12 W.:</b> A Time for Suffering. Rom. 8:12-18</p> <p><b>Nov. 13 T.:</b> A Time for Standing Fast. Gal. 5:1-10</p> <p><b>Nov. 14 F.:</b> A Time for Dying. Rom. 6:1-8</p> <p><b>Nov. 15 S.:</b> A Time for Hope. I Thess. 4:13-18</p> <p><b>Nov. 16 S.:</b> Sufficient in God. II Cor. 3:1-6</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us see how God led Paul's life and how He can lead our lives.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> about A.D. 47; II Corinthians about A.D. 55</p> <p><b>Place:</b> province of Galatia; II Corinthians was perhaps written at Philippi</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>God's Covenant and Paul</b></p> <p><b>I. At Pisidian Antioch:</b> Acts 13:13-15</p> <p><b>II. Paul's First Recorded Sermon:</b> Acts 13:16-41</p> <p>A. God's Early Dealings with Israel: vv. 16-20</p> <p>B. The First Two Kings of Israel: vv. 21-22</p> <p>C. John the Baptist and Jesus: vv. 23-25</p> <p>D. The Crucifixion and Resurrection: vv. 26-31</p>

- E. The Good News: vv. 32-37
- F. The Heart of the Message: vv. 38-41

### III. Results of Paul's Sermon: Acts 13:42-43

### IV. Opposition to the Message: Acts 13:44-52

- A. A Big Crowd: v. 44
- B. Jealousy of the Jews: v. 45
- C. Turning to the Gentiles: vv. 46-47
- D. Conversion of the Gentiles: v. 48
- E. Spread of the Gospel: v. 49
- F. Expulsion from the City: vv. 50-51
- G. Reaction of the Missionaries: v. 52

### V. Ministers of the New Covenant: II Corinthians 3:4-6

- A. Confidence: v. 4
- B. Competence: v. 5
- C. Ministers of a New Covenant: v. 6

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

Last Sunday we studied "God's Covenant and Peter"; today we study "God's Covenant and Paul." At the beginning of the Christian church Peter was by all odds the leading apostle. But as the church spread out to the Gentile world Paul became the outstanding leader. Peter is the main character in the first twelve chapters, though Stephen is the main figure in chapters 6 and 7 and Philip is in chapter 8. But Paul is the main character in chapters 13-28. So it can be said without question that Paul is the most important human individual in the Book of Acts. While Peter was God's appointed apostle to the Jews, Saul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7).

Saul's conversion is recorded in chapter 9, but the story of his great missionary work begins with chapter 13. The Holy Spirit indicated that Barnabas and Saul were to begin the great foreign missionary enterprise (vv. 1-3). Sent out by the Holy Spirit and the church, they first evangelized the Island of Cyprus (vv. 4-6), Barnabas's old home territory (4:36). There the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, was saved (vv. 7-12). The missionaries had made a good beginning!

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

Sharing God's good news was what Paul and Barnabas did, and that is what we are to do. We may not be called to be missionaries, as they were, or to be preachers of the gospel, but we are all obligated to share the good news of salvation that has transformed our lives.

Paul and Barnabas discovered that people respond to God's message in different ways—with enthusiasm, opposition, or indifference—and we will find the same thing. The last is hardest to take, and it is the most common attitude



today. But we can be devoutly thankful that tens of thousands (Greek, *myriads*) of people are responding to the message today with acceptance and faith.

So let's keep on sharing! Some people will be saved. And every soul that is saved is worth more than all the gold and silver in the world.

### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. Christ died for all the people of the world.
2. We should be interested in the salvation of all.
3. We should pray for our missionaries.
4. And we should share the good news with others.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. AT PISIDIAN ANTIOCH:

Acts 13:13-15

In verse 2 we read that the Holy Spirit said to the church at Antioch in Syria: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." At Paphos, at the west end of the Island of Cyprus, Paul (his Roman name; v. 9) was instrumental in the conversion of the Roman governor of the island, Sergius Paulus. So when they left Paphos, it was no longer "Barnabas and Saul" but "Paul and his companions" (v. 13). Paul was now the leader.

Evidently their assistant (v. 5), John Mark, who was a cousin of Barnabas, resented this change. In any case, he returned home to Jerusalem (v. 13).

From Perga, on the coast, Paul and Barnabas walked up over the hills to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath, as was their custom, they went into the synagogue and sat down (v. 14).

After the regular reading of the Law and the Prophets (v. 15), the synagogue rulers sent word to the visitors: "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." These missionaries had something few modern missionaries have—a pulpit and congregation waiting for them almost everywhere.

### II. PAUL'S FIRST RECORDED SERMON:

Acts 13:16-41

#### A. God's Early Dealings with Israel: vv. 16-20

Paul was not the kind of man who would sit still and pass up a golden opportunity like this. So he stood up and "motioned with his hand" to get the attention of the audience (v. 16). The custom of the Jews, as we have noted before, was to sit while teaching. But this was a Greek environment, even though in a Jewish synagogue. So Paul followed the Greek custom of standing up to speak, as we do today.

There were two classes of people in the synagogue: "men of Israel" and "Gentiles" who worshiped God. Many Gentiles had become disillusioned with the polytheistic paganism of their time and were attending the Jewish synagogues and believing in the one true God. To both of these classes Paul said, "Listen to me!"

Then he launched out on a brief, rapid survey of God's dealings with His people, Israel. God "chose our fathers," made them prosper in Egypt, led them out of that country, and put up with them for forty years in the desert (vv. 17-18). He helped them conquer seven

nations in Canaan "and gave their land to his people as their inheritance" (v. 19). "All this took about 450 years" (v. 20; cf. NASB). R. J. Knowling explains it this way: "The four hundred years of the people's sojourn in a strange land, Acts vii. 6, Gen. xv. 13, forty years in the wilderness, and some ten years for the actual conquest of the land made up the four hundred and fifty years" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, II, 292). After this the Israelites were ruled by judges "until the time of Samuel the prophet."

#### **B. The First Two Kings of Israel: vv. 21-22**

"Then the people asked for a king" (v. 21). God gave them Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, and he ruled forty years. Because he disobeyed, God removed him and made David king (v. 22). Paul told the people that the Lord had said that David was "a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do."

#### **C. John the Baptist and Jesus: vv. 23-25**

Paul now skips over about a thousand years of time, with no comment. Then he says, "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised" (v. 23). Before Jesus appeared publicly on the scene, "John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel" (v. 24). He said to the people: "Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (v. 25). "That one" was the Messiah; John was only the forerunner of the Messiah.

#### **D. The Crucifixion and Resurrection: vv. 26-31**

Again (cf. v. 16) we find two classes represented in the audience: "children of Abraham" and "God-fearing Gentiles." Both are "brothers." Paul told

them: "It is to us that this message of salvation has been sent" (v. 26)—that is, it is for both Jews and Gentiles. This was one of Paul's main emphases.

"The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath" (v. 27). Adam Clarke makes this comment: "A gentle excuse for the persecuting high priests. They did not know that Jesus was the Christ, because they did not know the prophets; and why did they not know the prophets which were read every Sabbath day? Because they did not desire to know His will, and therefore they knew not the doctrine of God; nor did they know that in condemning Christ, they fulfilled those very Scriptures which were read every Sabbath day in their synagogues" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, pp. 993-94). A. T. Robertson observes, "This ignorance mitigated the degree of their guilt but it did not remove it, for it was willing ignorance and prejudice, (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, III, 191).

"Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed" (v. 28). They accused Him of blasphemy, but that was because they refused to recognize the evidence of His divine sonship as shown in His life and miracles.

They buried His dead body. "But God raised him from the dead" (v. 30). The resurrection is one of the main keynotes in Pauline theology. It is the only hope for our salvation.

"For many days" (actually forty; 1:3) Jesus was seen by those who had followed Him from Galilee to Jerusalem (v. 31). These were now witnesses to the Resurrection of the One who had been unjustly executed.

#### **E. The Good News: vv. 32-37**

The good news is that what God promised to the fathers has now been fulfilled for their children. Paul gives three quotations from the Old Testa-

ment to bolster his statement about the Resurrection. David's body did see decay, but the body of Christ, which was resurrected (vv. 35-37), did not.

#### **F. The Heart of the Message: vv. 38-41**

Now Paul came to the heart of the matter: "Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (v. 38). Since all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), all need forgiveness, and Jesus provides this.

Then Paul made an important point for his Jewish-oriented audience: "Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (v. 39). We find this truth elaborated later in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, his main exposition of the fact that justification from sin does not come by the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, the crucified, risen Savior.

In closing, the apostle sounded a solemn warning. If His hearers refused the truth a terrible calamity awaited them.

### **III. RESULTS OF PAUL'S SERMON: Acts 13:42-43**

"As Paul and Barnabas" (literally, "they") were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath" (v. 42). This is what the early Greek manuscripts all say. The King James Version reads: "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath." No honest student of the Greek New Testament could defend this translation, which is based on no manuscripts earlier than the ninth century.

"When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of

God" (v. 43). The attitude of the listeners showed that God's grace had already inclined their hearts to accept the message and had made them eager to learn more of the good news. All they needed now was to continue in that grace.

### **IV. OPPOSITION TO THE MESSAGE: Acts 13:44-52**

#### **A. A Big Crowd: v. 44**

We are told that on the next Sabbath "almost the whole city" gathered to hear the Word of the Lord. There was intense enthusiasm—or, at the least, intense curiosity—about the previous Sabbath service. We must remember that in those days there were no movie theaters, no television sets in the homes, or even radios or telephones. For months at a time nothing very exciting happened. So these two unusual visitors in the synagogue created quite a sensation in the city. The power of the Holy Spirit in Paul's preaching was something decidedly different from the prosaic, powerless teaching of the rabbis. Thus a large crowd gathered to hear another message and to see what would happen this time.

Some have thought that the people came together in front of the place where the apostles were lodging. But it is more likely that all the people flocked to the synagogue.

#### **B. Jealousy of the Jews: v. 45**

"When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying." On "the Jews" A. T. Robertson comments, "Certainly not the proselytes of verse 43." He goes on to say: "Probably many of the Jews that were then favorably disposed to Paul's message had reacted against him under the influence of the rabbis during the week and evidently on this Sabbath very many Gentiles ("almost the whole city," "multitudes") had gathered, to the dis-



gust of the stricter Jews. Nothing is specifically stated here about the rabbis, but they were beyond doubt the instigators of, and the ringleaders in, the opposition as in Thessalonica (17:5). No such crowds came to the synagogue when they were the speakers" (*Word Pictures*, III, 197).

It was jealousy on the part of the Jews that brought about Jesus' death (Matt. 27:18). Envy and jealousy have caused more crime and hatred than any of us could possibly imagine.

### C. Turning to the Gentiles: vv.

46-47

Paul and Barnabas knew that there was no use trying to preach anymore there, with all the interruptions and bad spirit. They answered the Jews boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first" (v. 46). Robertson observes, "This position Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles will always hold, the Jew first in privilege and penalty (Rom. 1:16; 2:9 and 10)" (*Word Pictures*, III, 198).

But Paul and Barnabas had to add a sad note: "Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles." The Jews at Pisidian Antioch had missed their golden opportunity.

As always, Paul and Barnabas had an appropriate Scripture for the situation. This time they quoted Isaiah 49:6. God had appointed them to be a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation "to the ends of the earth" (v. 47).

Paul certainly did his part to carry out this commission, taking the gospel the full length of the Mediterranean to Spain (Rom. 15:24 and first century testimony). What every generation has needed is another Paul!

### D. Conversion of the Gentiles: v.

48

"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." The King James

Version has "ordained." But A. T. Robertson writes: "The word 'ordain' is not the best translation here. 'Appointed' . . . is better." He goes on to say: "This verse does not solve the vexed problem of divine sovereignty and human free agency. There is no evidence that Luke had in mind an *absolutum decretum* of personal salvation . . . Certainly the Spirit of God does move upon the human heart to which some respond, as here, while others push him away" (*Word Pictures*, III, 200). We would make only one observation: We cannot be true to the Scriptures and to what we observe constantly in life unless we believe in both divine sovereignty and human freedom.

### E. Spread of the Gospel: v. 49

"The word of the Lord spread through the whole region." Paul's regular policy was to establish a strong church in a metropolitan city and then let the gospel spread out from that center to the surrounding area.

### F. Expulsion from the City: vv.

50-51

"But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region" (v. 50). The God-fearers were converts to Judaism, who had not fully accepted the message of the missionaries. They followed their religious leaders in persecuting these dangerous "heretics."

Paul and Barnabas "shook the dust from their feet in protest against them" (v. 51). This was in fulfillment of Jesus' command to His disciples when He sent them out to preach: "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town" (Matt. 10:14).

Then the two missionaries went on to Iconium, about eighty miles to the east.



### G. Reaction of the Missionaries: v. 52

"And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit"—filled with joy because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Instead of being resentful, they rejoiced at the privilege of suffering persecution for their Master.

Robertson interprets "disciples" as meaning "the Gentile Christians in Antioch" (p. 203). But the mention of Iconium points toward Paul and Barnabas.

## V. MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT: II Corinthians 3:4-6

### A. Confidence: v. 4

"Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God." Alfred Plummer observes that the reference is to what precedes: "that he has no need of any credentials other than the testimony which the existence of the Corinthian Church bears; that fact by itself suffices to prove his Apostleship. But he at once hastens to show that in this confidence there is no self-praise and no claim to credit; for it is conditioned in two ways which entirely

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kept Paul constantly on the go for God?
2. What was the secret of his power?
3. How did his missionary strategy work?
4. Why did the Jews reject his message?
5. Why did God choose Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles?
6. How can we ascertain God's will for us?

exclude vain glorious thoughts; it is through Christ, and it is towards God." *Through Christ*—"therefore not through any innate power of our own. Apart from Him we could do nothing (Jn. xv. 5). He gave us the power we have." *To God*—"the quiet confidence which gives us strength (Is. xxx. 15) is not directed towards anything earthly as the ultimate source of strength, but towards God (Rom. xv. 16). The idea is that of looking towards the person on whom one relies" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 84).

### B. Competence: v. 5

"Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God." Paul puts it both negatively and positively. We have first to recognize and acknowledge the negative before we can receive the positive.

### C. Ministers of a New Covenant: v. 6

"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Plummer writes, "The covenant is fresh and effective, with plenty of time to run, in contrast to the old covenant, which is worn out and obsolete" (*Second Corinthians*, p. 85).

Regarding the last part of the verse Plummer comments: "We see here once more . . . how completely St. Paul had broken with the Jewish Law. . . . It is purely external: 'Thou shalt not do this overt act,' 'Thou shalt do this overt act.' It has no power to set free and strengthen the moral elements in man. It makes heavy demands, but it gives nothing. . . . The spirit of Christianity is the opposite of this. It is a living force. Instead of pressing the man down from without, it lays hold of him from within" (*Second Corinthians*, p. 87).

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Paul was the first great missionary of the Christian church, as well as its first great theologian. He set an example that is still a constant challenge to us.

From our lesson today we learn two secrets of his success as a missionary. The first is that he depended utterly on God, not himself. The power of the Holy Spirit operated in his life to produce results.

The second secret was that he al-

ways headed for the large cities, established a strong church there, and let the people of that church evangelize the surrounding area. I know of a denomination that spent fifty years largely in village work in one of the leading countries of Asia. At the end of that time it still had only twenty-five churches. Then it moved into the big cities and in almost no time had nearly a dozen more. This is sound strategy—long overdue.

November 23, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND THE NEW ISRAEL

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Isaiah 2:1-5

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God's Covenant and His New People*

**Youth Topic:** *Being God's People*

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 2; I Peter 2:4-10

**Scripture Lesson:** I Peter 2:4-10

**Memory Verse:** *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. I Peter 2:9*

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Good News Shared in the Early Church*

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 2; I Peter 2:4-10

**Scripture Lesson:** I Peter 2:4-10

**Memory Verse:** *And they went forth and preached everywhere. Mark 16:20a.*

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

Nov. 17 M.: A New Direction. Luke 5:36-39

Nov. 18 T.: A New Helper. Acts 1:6-14

Nov. 19 W.: A New Challenge. Acts 10:9-15, 28

Nov. 20 T.: A New Openness. Acts 15:13-23

Nov. 21 F.: A New Community. Eph. 1:11-23

Nov. 22 S.: A New People. Eph. 2:11-22

Nov. 23 S.: A New Israel. I Peter 2:2-10

LESSON AIM

To help us see our privilege and responsibility as the people of God in this age.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about A.D. 60

**Place:** Ephesians was written at Rome

LESSON OUTLINE

**God's Covenant and the New Israel**

**I. Former Status of Gentiles:** Ephesians 2:11-12

A. Uncircumcised: v. 11

B. Excluded from Israel: v.12

**II. One in Christ:** Ephesians 2:13-18

A. Brought Near in Christ: v. 13

B. Barrier Destroyed: vv. 14-15a

C. One New Man: vv. 15b-16

D. Peace to All: v. 17

E. Access to the Father: v. 18

**III. The Family of God: Ephesians 2:19-22**

- A. Members of God's Household: v. 19
- B. The Foundation: v. 20
- C. A Holy Temple: vv. 21-22

**IV. The Living Stone: I Peter 2:4-8**

- A. Rejected... Chosen: v. 4
- B. Living Stones: v. 5
- C. A Precious Cornerstone: v. 6
- D. The Capstone: v. 7
- E. A Stone of Stumbling: v. 8

**V. A Chosen People: I Peter 2:9-10**

- A. A Precious People: v. 9
- B. The People of God: v. 10

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

We spent considerable time studying God's covenant with Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Jeremiah, and Ezra. Now we are looking at God's covenant with the New Israel through Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant.

The Old Israel was primarily one race, the "Jews"—as they came to be called during and after the Babylonian captivity, because they came mainly from Judah. But the New Israel is composed of people from all races and nationalities. In the old days you were born a Jew; today whoever you are, you must be "born again" into the family of God, a spiritual regeneration rather than a physical regeneration. It is not a matter of who your earthly father is, but of belonging to your heavenly Father.

Jesus Christ became one of us, that we, both Jews and Gentiles, might become one with Him.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

Being God's people is a privilege and honor but also a responsibility and challenge. There can be no greater honor than being a part of the family of God. But there can also be no greater challenge than that of living as a child of God, representing our Father rightly in our daily living.

Today "God's people" is synonymous with "the church of Jesus Christ." In the New Testament the term *ecclesia* is used for both the whole church of Jesus Christ around the world and for the local congregation. This means that if we belong to Christ and His church we should also belong to a local church. The modern anti-church propaganda—proclaimed by some young people—is not biblical or practical.

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. The early church shared the good news with others.
2. That is our responsibility today.
3. God loves the whole world and wants all people to know about His salvation.
4. We need to tell them this.



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. FORMER STATUS OF GENTILES:

Ephesians 2:11-12

#### A. Uncircumcised: v. 11

"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (that done in the body by the hands of men). . . ."

The opening word "therefore" points the readers back to the previous paragraph. Verses 1 and 2 describe their previous condition. Verses 4-10 show their present privileges in Christ.

But Paul wants these Ephesian Christians to remember that formerly they were Gentiles. This agrees with what we read of the founding of the church at Ephesus in Acts 19. Paul preached Christ in the Jewish synagogue for three months (v. 8). But when his listeners there rejected the gospel message, he moved to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, where he carried on for two years (vv. 9-10). Obviously his listeners there would be mainly Gentiles. Even if we conclude that the Epistle to the Ephesians was intended as an encyclical letter for the whole province of Asia, the readers would be mostly Gentiles.

Rather contemptuously the Gentiles were called "uncircumcised" by the Jews, who prided themselves on being "the circumcision." But Paul points out that this was "done in the body by the hands of men." It was not a spiritual work done by God, but a physical work done by man. True Christianity is altogether a spiritual movement, and when we over-emphasize water baptism or any other outward ritual in the physical realm we are denying the essential character of our faith.

#### B. Excluded from Israel: v. 12

In their unregenerate state these Gentile readers were "separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Is-

rael and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."

Connecting verses 11-13 with verses 4-10, S.D.F. Salmond writes: "The great things done for them by God's grace should incline them to think of the past from which they have been delivered. The remembrance of that past will make them more thankful for their present privilege, and more careful to walk in the good works which God has in view for them" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, III, 291).

### II. ONE IN CHRIST:

Ephesians 2:13-18

#### A. Brought Near in Christ: v. 13

Paul has just reminded his Gentile readers that formerly they were completely on the outside of Israel, of the covenants, of hope, of God. The door was shut tight, and they were left in the dark.

Then comes the glorious declaration: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." It took Christ's blood, His death on the cross, to bring us near to God. We should be eternally grateful to Jesus for shedding His blood for us, splitting the curtain of separation wide open and bringing us into the Holy of Holies of God's presence (Matt. 27:51).

It is sin that separates man from God. And so only the blood of Christ can bring us near to God, when we accept that blood as the atonement for our sins. "Atonement" literally means "at-one-ment." And it is only "in Christ Jesus" that we can have "at-one-ment" with God.

Redemption is costly business. That is a truth we should never forget!

#### B. Barrier Destroyed: vv. 14-15a

"For he himself is our peace." It is more than just "He is our peace" (KJV).

In the Greek *autos* is placed first in the sentence for emphasis. Salmond writes: "As most commentators notice, the emphasis is on the *autos*—'He and no other.' But there is probably more in it than that. . . the point of the *autos* is not only 'He alone,' but '*He in His own person.*' It is not only that the peace was made by Christ and ranks as His achievement, but that it is so identified with Him that were He away it would also fail,—so dependent on Him that apart from Him we cannot have it. And He is thus for us 'the *Peace.*' . . . Peace in the absolute sense to the exclusion of all other" (*EGT*, III, 294).

In the same vein T. K. Abbott observes: "'He Himself is our peace'; He has not brought about peace by a mere external action or arrangement; it is in His own person that He gives it" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, p. 60).

This truth cannot be emphasized too strongly. Peace is not a "once for all" experience. I have peace this moment only because of the consciousness of Christ's presence right now in my heart.

Paul goes on to say that Christ has "made the two [Jew and Gentile] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility"—hostility between Jews and Gentiles. How did He do this? "By abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (v. 15). Jesus Christ was the first and only person in all human history to obey perfectly the entire law of Moses. Therefore He could abolish the law and in His own person bring people near to God.

### C. One New Man: vv. 15b-16

"His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace" (v. 15b). Salmond says: "The new creation and the new union have their ground and principle in Christ. What was contemplated, too, was not simply the making of one man where formerly there were two, but the

making of one new man. The result was not that, though the separation between them was removed, the Jew still remained Jew and the Gentile still Gentile. It was something new, the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile being lost in a third order of 'man'—the Christian man" (*EGT*, III, 296).

Paul continues: "And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (v. 16). Jews and Gentiles are not only to be reconciled to each other, but both are to be reconciled to God.

### D. Peace to All: v. 17

"He came and preached peace to you who were far away"—the Gentiles—"and peace to those who were near"—the Jews. Because Christ had paid the price for the reconciliation of all men to God, He could say, "Peace!" to all, both Jews and Gentiles.

### E. Access to the Father: v. 18

"For through him [Jesus Christ] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit." Note the full Trinity here, all involved in our salvation. The Father planned it, the Son provided it, and the Spirit applies it. It is only because of the death of Christ at Calvary that we sinners can approach God. But it is the Holy Spirit who leads us into God's presence.

## III. THE FAMILY OF GOD: Ephesians 2:19-22

### A. Members of God's Household: v. 19

"Consequently, you [Gentile believers in Christ] are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." In Christ we become members of the family of God.

### B. The Foundation: v. 20

Paul makes a quick shift from the idea of "household" (*oikeioi*) to that of

“house” as a building (*oikos*). This house is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” But isn’t Christ the only foundation for the church? Yes (I Cor. 3:11). Salmond writes: “Here, therefore, it seems best on the whole to understand the Gospel of Christ as preached by the Apostles to be the ‘foundation’ on which their converts were built up into the spiritual house” (*EGT*, III, 299). The “prophets” are New Testament prophets (after “apostles”). (We shall note Christ as “cornerstone” in I Peter.)

### C. A Holy Temple: vv. 21-22

In Christ “the whole building [the church] is joined together [as one] and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too [perhaps he here means particularly the Ephesian congregation] are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” The Holy Spirit wants to make the presence of God real in every local church.

## IV. THE LIVING STONE:

### I Peter 2:4-8

#### A. Rejected . . . Chosen: v. 4

Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit, writes, “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him. . . .” The use of the present participle in the Greek for “come” may suggest the “perpetual lifelong drawing nigh of the soul to its Redeemer” (quoted by Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, p. 128).

Christ is here called “the living Stone.” Bigg notes that “the phrase means much more than ‘an animated stone.’” What lives is “spiritual, divine, eternal” (p. 128).

This Stone is rejected by men but chosen by God. This was true then, and it is still true today.

#### B. Living Stones: v. 5

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.” It is

unfortunate that the King James Version has here “lively stones.” The Greek has the same word (present participle of the verb “to live”) as in verse 4, where the King James Version correctly translates it “living.”

There is in this verse a surprising mixture. As Christians we are “being built into a spiritual house [the Greek word can mean “house” or “household”] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Bigg observes: “The living stones, when they are built into the house, become also the body of priests who minister in the house, and the priests must be holy. The word *hagios* is repeated here with emphasis from i. 15, and resumes all that has been said from that point” (*Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, p. 129).

What about the “spiritual sacrifices”? Bigg writes: “St. Peter does not define the sacrifices further than by saying that they are spiritual, as befits the spiritual house and the holy priesthood. The epithet *pneumaticas* distinguishes them from the offerings of the Law; they are not shadows and symbols, but realities, such as spirit offers to spirit, and a holy priesthood to a holy God” (*Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, p. 129).

In Hebrews 13:15 we read: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of our lips that confess his name.” In Romans 15:16 Paul speaks of another kind of spiritual sacrifice. He says that God had made him “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” The fruit of our Spirit-directed, Spirit-empowered labors for Christ are an offering that will be especially “acceptable to God.”

#### C. A Precious Cornerstone: v. 6

In verses 6, 7, and 8 we find three quotations from the Old Testament, mainly from Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14. Bigg suggests that in these three verses “St. Peter is catching



up, reiterating, justifying from Scripture, words which he has used immediately before, in verses 4 and 5; but some of them have been present in his thoughts from the first. . . . The passage which occurred to him first was Ps. cxviii. 22, from which comes *apododomismenon* [rejected] of ver. 4; and this word started the train of association which suggested the other quotations" (*Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, p. 130).

Isaiah 28:16 reads:

See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious  
cornerstone,  
And the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.

Adam Clarke writes: "This intimates that the foundation of the Christian church should be laid at Jerusalem; and there it was laid, for there Christ suffered, and there the preaching of the gospel commenced. A *chief cornerstone*. This is the same as the foundation stone; and it is called here the chief cornerstone because it is laid in the foundation, at an angle of the building where its two sides form the groundwork of a side and end wall. And this might probably be designed to show that, in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles were to be united" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 1302).

#### D. The Capstone: v. 7

To those who believe, "this stone," Jesus Christ, "is precious." But to those who do not believe,

the stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone.

In verse 6 Christ is called the "cornerstone." The Greek word, found only there and in Ephesians 2:20, literally means "lying at the extreme corner." But here (v. 7) Jesus is called the capstone—literally, "head of the corner." Some would translate this also as "cornerstone" (e.g., NASB, following Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English*

*Lexicon of the New Testament*). But Joachim Jeremias says that "both expressions indicate the 'final stone' in a building probably set over the gate" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, I, 792).

#### E. A Stone of Stumbling: v. 8

Christ is:

A stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes men fall.

The total picture of these three verses is impressive. Those who trust in Jesus as the cornerstone "will never be put to shame" (v. 6). Those who reject him—the Jewish "builders"—will be embarrassed to find that God has made Him the capstone of the church (v. 7). But meanwhile they stumble over the Stone they threw aside (v. 8)! The rejected Christ becomes their Judge.

#### V. A CHOSEN PEOPLE:

I Peter 2:9-10

##### A. A Precious People: v. 9

One of the most unfortunate translations in the King James Version—unfortunate because it has misled thousands of people into fanatical foolishness—is found in this verse: "a

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the real meaning of *peace*?
2. How can we have constant peace?
3. What makes the true church one body?
4. What are some of the privileges and responsibilities in being "a part of the family of God?"
5. What makes a church (Congregation) a temple of God?
6. What does it mean to be "a royal priesthood"?



peculiar people." Today the popular meaning of *peculiar* is "eccentric, odd, queer, weird." I once heard an odd-looking woman publicly thanking the Lord that she was "one of God's *peculiar* people." Ridiculous!

The Greek simply says: "a people for one's [God's] own possession." For forty years I have been telling people to cross out "peculiar" here and write "precious" instead.

"Precious" is not only accurate, but ennobling and uplifting, whereas "peculiar" has had the opposite effect on too many people. But the most accurate translation is "a people for God's own possession" (NASB) or "a people belonging to God" (NIV). Since we have these accurate, evangelical translations, let's use them.

What a privilege it is for us as Christians to be God's "chosen race" (NASB). We are also a "royal priesthood," because we belong to the King and are His priests to bring people to God! And we are to be a "holy nation," because we represent a holy God. And He calls us

His "precious possession." What more could anyone want?

All these promises are given that we "may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Charles Bigg comments, "The Christian is to show forth in word and life, not merely the goodness of God, but His glory, His greatness, all His noble attributes, wisdom, justice, strength" (*Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, p. 135).

### B. The People of God: v. 10

Once more Peter addresses himself specifically to the Gentile believers. They were formerly "not a people." It was the Jews who had the privilege of being God's chosen people. But now, in Christ, these believers were "the people of God." Formerly they had not received mercy, but now they had.

All we have of eternal value we have only in Christ. That should make our hearts well up in continual praise and gratitude to Him!

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

There are many people today who feel that they are "no people." They are sad, lonely, discouraged—feeling that life isn't worth living.

We need to ask God to lead us to

them. We have good news: that God loves them, He wants to save them, and He is eager to welcome them as His own. Then they will become "the people of God," with all that that involves.

November 30, 1980

## GOD'S COVENANT AND THE NEW JERUSALEM

DEVOTIONAL READING	Isaiah 11:1-9
	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>God's Covenant and the New Jerusalem</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Looking to the Future</i>
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Background Scripture:</b> Revelation 11:15-19; 21 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Revelation 11:15-19; 21:10-14 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.</i> Revelation 11:15
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>God's Promise Continued</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 4:21-22; Revelation 21 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Revelation 21:1-7 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.</i> Psalm 145:3
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>Nov. 24 M.:</b> The Everlasting Kingdom. Rev. 11:15-19 <b>Nov. 25 T.:</b> Proclamations of the Angels. Rev. 14:6-13 <b>Nov. 26 W.:</b> Sing Praise to God. Rev. 15:1-6 <b>Nov. 27 T.:</b> The Marriage of the Lamb. Rev. 19:6-10 <b>Nov. 28 F.:</b> The Great Judgment. Rev. 20:11-15 <b>Nov. 29 S.:</b> The New Creation. Rev. 21:1-8 <b>Nov. 30 S.:</b> The New Jerusalem. Rev. 21:10-14
LESSON AIM	To increase our anticipation of the blessings of the next life.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> Revelation was written about A.D. 95 <b>Place:</b> the Island of Patmos
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>God's Covenant and the New Jerusalem</b> <b>I. God's Kingdom Established:</b> Revelation 11:15-19 A. An Eternal Kingdom: v. 15 B. The Twenty-four Elders: v. 16 C. Great Power: v. 17 D. A Time of Judgment: v. 18 E. The Temple in Heaven: v. 19 <b>II. A New Heaven and a New Earth:</b> Revelation 21:1-8 A. No Sea: v. 1 B. The New Jerusalem: v. 2 C. God's Dwelling with Men: v. 3

- D. No More Sorrow or Suffering: v. 4
- E. Everything New: v. 5
- F. The Alpha and the Omega: v. 6
- G. Reward for the Overcomer: v. 7
- H. The Second Death: v. 8

### III. The New Jerusalem: Revelation 21:9-14

- A. The Bride of the Lamb: v. 9
- B. The Holy City: v. 10
- C. Like a Brilliant Jewel: v. 11
- D. The Gates of the City: vv. 12-13
- E. The Wall of the City: v. 14

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

As we come to the end of our quarter's study of "God's Covenant with His People," it is appropriate that our final lesson should be based on Revelation, the last book of the Bible, sometimes called the capstone of divine revelation.

Most of the Book of Revelation (cc. 4-21) deals with the future—what is still future for us today. The Greek word for "revelation" is *apocalypsis*, which has been taken over into English as "apocalypse." It literally means an "uncovering" or "unveiling." Except as God reveals it to us—uncovers it for us—the future is veiled to us. So it is only by divine revelation that we can have any certain knowledge of the future.

The central part of the Book of Revelation is taken up with divine judgments on sinful humanity—what is often referred to as "the great tribulation." But the final two chapters give us a brief glimpse of what the next life will be for those who obey God. It ought to whet our appetites for heaven!

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

Christian young people should be looking to the future. In fact, we all need a proper perspective of the past, the present, and the future.

We have to live in the present—that is an inescapable fact. But if we are going to live well today, we have to live in the light of the past—profiting by the lessons of history, and also look to the future. For if we forget the future, we will fail to live a full life in the present.

The Book of Revelation, from which our lesson today is taken, shows us two kinds of future. The future of those who reject God's way of salvation is a black picture of judgment and eternal punishment. The future of those who obey God is a bright picture of bliss and blessing throughout eternity in His presence. Let's not miss it!

#### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. The apostle John was on the tiny, rocky Island of Patmos.
2. He was a prisoner there for preaching the gospel.
3. God revealed to him what the future would be.
4. Revelation shows us that God's promises will finally be fulfilled.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. GOD'S KINGDOM ESTABLISHED: Revelation 11:15-19

#### A. An Eternal Kingdom: v. 15

This paragraph tells us what happened when "the seventh angel sounded his trumpet." The previous six trumpets (8:6-9:21) portrayed serious judgments on the earth because of men's sins. But the keynote of the seventh trumpet is the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth.

It is an eternal kingdom. Angelic hosts in heaven cry out:

The kingdom of the world  
has become the kingdom  
of our Lord and of his Christ,  
and he will reign for ever and ever.

Robert Mounce, in his excellent commentary on Revelation in "The New International Commentary on the New Testament" series, writes: "The burden of the angelic declaration is that the dominion and rule of this world have been transferred to God and his Christ, who shall reign forever and ever. This great eschatological event which established once and for all the universal sovereignty of God is a recurring theme in Old Testament prophecy. Daniel predicted the day when the kingdom of God would utterly destroy the kingdoms of this world (Dan. 2:31-45, esp. vs. 44). The day is coming, said Zechariah, when God will be 'King over all the earth' (Zech. 14:9)... 'Our Lord and his Christ' reflects Psalm 2:2, which was interpreted messianically by the early church (Acts 4:26-28). Although the Son will ultimately be subjected to the Father (I Cor. 15:28), he will nevertheless share the eternal rule of God. The singular ('he shall rule') emphasizes the unity of this joint sovereignty" (*The Book of Revelation*, pp. 230-31).

#### B. The Twenty-four Elders: v. 16

These are first mentioned in 4:4 as seated on twenty-four thrones surrounding the throne of God. "They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads." There is general agreement among New Testament scholars that the twenty-four elders represent the totality of God's people in all ages—the twelve tribes of Israel (OT), plus the twelve apostles (NT) as the nucleus of the church of Christ.

Though seated on thrones, the twenty-four elders "fell on their faces and worshiped God." We find the same thing in 5:8, 14.

#### C. Great Power: v. 17

The twenty-four elders appropriately began their worship with thanksgiving to God:

We give thanks to you, Lord God  
Almighty,  
who is and who was,  
because you have taken your great  
power  
and have begun to reign.

In the second line of this poem of praise the King James Version adds "and art to come," from 1:4. But this is not in any good Greek manuscript and so does not belong here. James Moffatt says that it "is naturally omitted from this paean; God has already come!" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, V, 420).

The expression "who is and who was" underscores the fact that God is eternal. He is eternal, and He always was—has existed forever.

Robert Mounce comments on this verse: "The song of the elders is a hymn of thanksgiving to the One who with a great display of power will enter upon his eternal reign. The event is so certain that throughout this section it is repeatedly spoken of as already having taken place. 'Great power' does not in-



dicare omnipotence as a divine attribute in a general sense, but points to the final conflict in which God overpowers all his enemies. As in 1:8 and 4:8, he is the Lord God, the Almighty, He is able to accomplish all that in his decrees he has determined to perform" (*Revelation*, p. 231).

#### D. A Time of Judgment: v. 18

The nations were angry;  
and your wrath has come.  
The time has come for judging the  
dead,  
and for rewarding your servants  
the prophets  
and your saints and those who  
reverence your name  
both small and great—  
and for destroying those who  
destroy the earth.

Mounce writes: "The reign of God is established by a great demonstration of divine wrath against the defiant anger of the world (cf. 16:9-11, 21). The eschatological crisis has arrived with its inevitable judgment. As the proclamation of the heavenly host drew upon a messianic interpretation of Psalm 2, so also does the song of the elders. Nations rage and rulers take counsel against God and his anointed (Ps. 2:2), and he will answer with wrath (Ps. 2:5, 12). There is an appropriateness in God's tailoring the punishment to fit the crime" (*Revelation*, p. 231).

#### E. The Temple in Heaven: v. 19

The temple of God was opened in heaven and in it was seen the ark of the covenant. R. H. Charles makes this helpful comment: "This last act is symbolical. As the earthly ark was a witness to the covenant between God and Israel, the heavenly ark is a witness to the covenant between God and the Christian community, which is the true Israel. By the manifestation of the latter at this stage God has pledged Himself to the fulfillment of all the great deeds celebrated in the heavenly song just sung"

(*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, I, 297).

Then "there came flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm." Judgment was being ushered in again.

## II. A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH: Revelation 21:1-8

### A. No Sea: v. 1

In chapter 20 we read of the millennial kingdom of Christ (v. 4), followed by the great white throne judgment (vv. 11-15). Now we read of a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal order (cc. 21-22).

In these last two chapters of Revelation we find many things we dread down here that will not be in the new order of things. But all that John mentions here is: "no more sea." What is the reason for this?

As I write these words I am sitting on a balcony in Florida overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. I was swimming in the ocean before breakfast today, as usual. The sea is a delightful thing. The quiet surf and the cool, invigorating breeze makes it easy to write; it is an inspiring expanse of water, reaching clear to the horizon. So why does God see fit to decree here that "there was no longer any sea"?

Numbers of answers have been given. We know that the ancient Israelites dreaded the sea. Plutarch says that the Egyptians of his day felt that the sea was not a part of nature, but something alien and hostile (*De Iside et Osiride* 7, 32). But probably H. B. Swete makes the best suggestion when he says that "in the mind of the writer it is associated with ideas which are at variance with the character of the New Creation" (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 275).

Henry Alford makes another suggestion. He says on this verse: "The vision does not necessarily suppose the annihilation of the old creation, but only its passing away as to its outward and

recognizable form, and renewal to a fresh and more glorious one. And though not here stated on the surface, it is evident that the method of renewal is that described in 2 Pet. iii. 10ff.; namely, a renovation by fire. This alone will account for the unexpected and interesting feature here introduced, namely that the sea exists no longer" (*The Greek Testament*, IV, 736). Whatever the reason, the sea was gone.

### B. The New Jerusalem: v. 2

John saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, "prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

There has been much discussion as to whether an actual city is meant, or whether it is just a symbol of the church in its perfected state. It seems to me that verses 9 and 10 settle that question; no real city is meant. Apocalyptic language is largely symbolical. Martin Kiddle writes: "It is a city which is a family. The ideal of perfect community, unrealizable on earth because of the curse of sin which vitiated the first creation, is now embodied in the redeemed from all nations" (*The Revelation of St. John*, pp. 415-16). A. M. Hunter makes this interesting observation: "The consummation of the Christian hope is supremely social. It is no 'flight of the alone to the Alone' but life in the redeemed community of heaven" (*Probing the New Testament*, p. 156).

On the middle of the verse Robert Mounce observes about the Holy City: "It comes down from God, that is to say, the church is not a voluntary organization created by man but a fellowship initiated and given by God (cf. Mt. 16:18)" (*Revelation*, p. 371).

The description of the city, "as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband," is further elaborated in verses 11-21. She was shining like beautiful jewels.

In chapter 17 we read about "the great prostitute" (v. 1), who is identified as "Babylon the Great" (v. 5)—a symbolic name for Rome. The fall of

Babylon is described graphically in chapter 18 (note especially verse 10).

On the basis of these strikingly contrasted parallels, G. R. Beasley-Murray observes: "Revelation as a whole may be characterized as *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the subtitle, *The Harlot and the Bride*" (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 315).

It should be noted that the "great harlot" wore a scarlet robe as a prostitute (17:4). But the Holy City was like "a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

### C. God's Dwelling with Men: v. 3

A loud voice from the throne said, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them." That will be the greatest blessing we shall enjoy in the next life.

A comparison of the New American Standard Bible and New International Version shows that we cannot know for certain whether the last clause, "and be their God," was in the original text (see NASB marginal note). But the idea is implied in the verse, whether expressed or not.

### D. No More Sorrow or Suffering: v. 4

The voice continued: "He will wipe away every tear [the Greek is singular] from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." All the things mentioned here have come as the result of sin, and final redemption will eliminate every one of them. We can afford to endure these things for a few years down here, when we have God's promise that there will be none of them in the next life for His people.

### E. Everything New: v. 5

The One seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" John was commanded: "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

### F. The Alpha and the Omega: v. 6

Once more the Lord spoke. This time He said, "It is done." This is one word in the Greek, *gegonan*—literally, "They have come to pass." James Moffatt suggests, "Tis done, all is over" (*EGT*, V, 480). We find this expression also in 16:17.

The Lord continued: "I am the Alpha and the Omega [the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet], the Beginning and the End." Mounce writes: "That God is the beginning refers not only to the fact that he was first in point of time . . . but also that he is the source and origin of all things. He is the end in the sense that he constitutes their goal or aim" (*Revelation*, p. 374).

Then the promise is made: "To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life." This is a favorite idea in Scripture, found in Isaiah 55:1 and in Jesus' promise in John 4:10-13. It is repeated again in Revelation 22:17.

### G. Reward for the Overcomer: v. 7

We find a promise to the overcomer at the close of each of the letters to the seven churches of the Province of Asia (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Here the promise is: "He who overcomes will in-

herit all this [all the things He has been talking about], and I will be his God, and he will be my son." That will be worth all the battle!

### H. The Second Death: v. 8

Very different is the fate of the cowardly unbelievers, who do not overcome. "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.

In 19:20 we are told that the Beast and the False Prophet were thrown into "the fiery lake of burning sulphur," and also the devil himself in 20:10. In 20:14 we read that death and Hades were thrown into "the lake of fire" and that it is "the second death." This has given rise to the saying: "Born once, die twice; born twice, die once." The second death is eternal death, separation from God forever.

## III. THE NEW JERUSALEM: Revelation 21:9-14

### A. The Bride of the Lamb: v. 9

"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues"—this takes us back to chapter 16. The angel said to John: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." This is evidently the same angel that summoned John to see the punishment of the great prostitute (17:1). Mounce notes "the contrast between the great harlot (the wicked city Babylon) and the bride of the Lamb (the holy city Jerusalem). One is of the earth, symbolizing the unbridled passion and evil of man, and the other descends from heaven, the epitome of all that is pure and beautiful." He also notes: "As we approach the close of the Apocalypse, the figure of the Lamb becomes increasingly prominent. In the next twenty-two verses he is mentioned seven times" (*Revelation*, p. 377).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the kingdom of our heart become the kingdom of Christ?
2. What did the ark (chest) in the tabernacle signify?
3. Why do we need a new heaven and earth?
4. Why is a city used as the symbol of the church?
5. What part do we have in helping God to make things new in our lives?
6. Why is the term *Lamb* used so much in Revelation?



### B. The Holy City: v. 10

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (cf. v. 2). The fact that the new Jerusalem is identified (vv. 9-10) as the bride of the Lamb shows that it is the church of Jesus Christ that is meant (Eph. 5:25, 32). This should alert us to the fact that the description that follows (vv. 11-21) is not to be taken literally, but figuratively. Christ’s bride is not a material city, with material walls and gates, and material measurements. John is simply using material language to describe the indescribable beauties of the spiritual realm.

### C. Like a Brilliant Jewel: v. 11

The great prostitute was covered with glittering jewelry (17:4). But the

bride of the Lamb was radiant with the transparency of crystal. It is the radiance of Christ that should shine out in our lives.

### D. The Gates of the City: vv. 12-13

The high wall had twelve gates, three on each side. This speaks of ready access. We are all invited to enter the city to become a part of the bride of Christ.

“On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.” The Old Testament saints will be a part of the eternal people of God.

### E. The Wall of the City: v. 14

The twelve foundations carry the names of the twelve apostles. These, of course, represent the New Testament church of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:20).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

“I am making everything new!” (21:5). That applies not only to the new heaven and new earth of the future, but also to our new life in Christ right here and now.

God wants to make everything new in our hearts and lives. Instead of hatred, He wants to plant love in our hearts; instead of selfishness, a dedicated desire to help others. He wants to

give us a new lifestyle. Our desires, thoughts, motives—He wishes to make them all new.

We are made “new creatures in Christ Jesus,” in a moment. But it takes a lifetime to make us new all over—inside and out. God says, “I am making all things new!” Let’s let Him do that every day in every way.





# **THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

**Unit I: Preparation for Ministry**

**Unit II: The Meaning of Discipleship**

**Unit III: Training for Service**



December 7, 1980

# MATTHEW PRESENTS THE MESSIAH

DEVOTIONAL READING	Isaiah 35
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Matthew Presents the Messiah</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Meeting the Messiah</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 1:1-17; 4:18-22; 5:17-20; 9:9; 13:51-52; 23:1-12</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matt. 1:1, 17; 5:17-20; 9:9; 13:51-52</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.</i> Matthew 5:17</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>Learning About Jesus</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 1:1-17; 4:18-22; 5:17-20; 9:9; 13:51-52; 23:1-12</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>If anyone serves me, he must follow me.</i> John 12:26</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>Dec. 1 M.: The Genealogy of Jesus. Matt. 1:1-17</p> <p>Dec. 2 T.: Jesus and the Law. Matt. 5:17-20</p> <p>Dec. 3 W.: The Intention of the Law. Matt. 5:21-26</p> <p>Dec. 4 T.: Love for Enemies. Matt. 5:43-48</p> <p>Dec. 5 F.: The Cost of Following Jesus. Matt. 10:34-39</p> <p>Dec. 6 S.: Treasures Old and New. Matt. 13:51-52</p> <p>Dec. 7 S.: The One True Master. Matt. 23:1-12</p>
LESSON AIM	To show the purpose of Matthew in writing his Gospel.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> A.D. 28-30</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Galilee</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Matthew Presents the Messiah</b></p> <p><b>I. The Genealogy of Jesus: Matthew 1:1-17</b></p> <p>A. A Jewish Genealogy: vv. 1-2</p> <p>B. Four Women: vv. 3-6</p> <p>C. Three Divisions: v. 17</p> <p><b>II. The Fulfillment of the Law: Matthew 5:17-20</b></p> <p>A. Christ the Fulfiller: v. 17</p> <p>B. Indestructibility of the Law: v. 18</p> <p>C. Breaking or Keeping the Law: v. 19</p> <p>D. Superior Righteousness: v. 20</p>



### III. The Call of Matthew: Matthew 9:9

#### IV. A Disciple in the Kingdom: Matthew 13:51-52

- A. Jesus' Question: v. 51
- B. Jesus' Affirmation: v. 52

#### V. The Teachers of the Law: Matthew 23:1-12

- A. In Moses' Seat: vv. 1-2
- B. Failure to Practice: vv. 3-4
- C. Outward Show: vv. 5-7
- D. Need for Humility: vv. 8-12

Today we begin a study of the Gospel of Matthew, certainly one of the most fascinating books in the Bible. Twenty-one sessions are devoted to its twenty-eight chapters, including a Christmas lesson on December 21 and an Easter lesson on April 19.

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, who came to fulfill God's Old Testament promises. The outline of our study (numbers in parenthesis indicate chapters in Matthew) is as follows:

- I. Preparation for Ministry (1-4)—4 sessions
- II. The Meaning of Discipleship (5-12)—4 sessions
- III. Training for Service (13-18)—4 sessions
- IV. Affirmations of the Kingdom (19-25)—5 sessions
- V. Through Suffering to Victory (26-28)—4 sessions

The first three units (twelve sessions) draw upon the first eighteen chapters of Matthew and will be studied during the December-February quarter. The last two units complete the study of the Gospel and occupy the months of March and April. Today's session is introductory to the entire study, dealing with the nature and purpose of Matthew's Gospel.

Meeting the Messiah is what we shall be doing in our study of Matthew's Gospel, and that was Matthew's purpose in writing it.

In this first book of the New Testament Jesus is presented not only as the Messiah (Greek, "Christ") but as the King. The phrase "the Kingdom of heaven" is used here thirty-three times and nowhere else in the New Testament. The term *kingdom* is found fifty-two times in this Gospel.

When we hear the word *kingdom* today we usually think of an area ruled by a king. In the New Testament, however, it means the *rule* or *reign* of God.

Actually, as we shall find in our study of Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom in our hearts. We need to accept Christ as our King of all.

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

#### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. Studying the Gospels is learning about Jesus.
2. We see Him there as our Lord and Savior.
3. He wants us to follow Him, to live as He lived.
4. This means primarily showing our love to others.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS:

Matthew 1:1-17

#### A. A Jewish Genealogy: vv. 1-2

"A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." This verse makes a perfect bridge from the Old Testament to the New. It ties us at one end to two of the main characters of the Old Testament, Abraham and David. At the other end it ties us to Jesus Christ, the one dominant character of the New Testament.

"Jesus" means "Savior." The Greek word *Christos* (Christ) means "anointed one;" The Hebrew equivalent is *mashiah* (Messiah). The Jesus of the Gospels is the Messiah of the Old Testament prophecy.

Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jews, as we are cued in to in the very first verse. He is presenting Jesus the Jewish Messiah as "the son of David," one of the Jewish titles for the Messiah. Jesus is also "the son of Abraham," the "seed" of Abraham through whom all mankind would be blessed (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16).

And so Matthew's genealogy of Jesus begins with Abraham (v. 2) and comes down to Christ (v. 16). This is in contrast to the genealogy of Jesus found in Luke's Gospel (3:27-38), which begins with Jesus and goes back to Adam, "the son of God"—that is, created by God. Because Luke was writing for the Greeks, he went back beyond Abraham. He is not emphasizing, as Matthew was, that Jesus was a Jew, but rather that He is the universal Savior for all mankind.

#### B. Four Women: vv. 3-6

Ordinarily women were not included in any Jewish genealogy. The rabbis had this rule: "The descent on the father's side only shall be called a descent; the descent by the mother is not called any descent" (Samuel J. Andrews, *Life of Our Lord*, p. 61).

Why, then, does Matthew include these? Two of the women were Israelites—Tamar (v. 3) and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah (v. 6)—but were immoral (Gen. 38:13-18; II Sam. 11:2-5). The other two women were foreigners. Rahab (v. 5) was a Canaanite, who saved the spies (Josh. 6:25; Heb. 11:31). Ruth (v. 5) was a Moabitess, whose people were normally under God's curse because the women of Moab had enticed the Israelites to idolatry and immorality (Num. 25:1-2).

"Now the answer becomes clear. It is God's grace triumphing over man's sin. Though the Jews utterly rejected such an idea, the gospel declared that through divine grace both sinners and foreigners could be brought into the kingdom of God. Salvation was to be offered to men of every class, every color, every creed. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of hope to the lowest sinner and the most remote heathen. That is the glory of the Good News" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 11). That is also the note on which Matthew ends his Gospel (28:16-20).

Notice that verse 16 does not read, "and Jacob the father of Joseph, and Joseph the father of Jesus," following the pattern of the previous verses. Why not? Because Joseph did not beget Jesus. Matthew is very careful to protect the virgin birth, which is stated clearly in verse 20, by writing here: "and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

#### C. Three Divisions: v. 17

One of the characteristics of Matthew's Gospel is its love for significant numbers. Here we have the number *three*. The genealogy of Jesus is divided into three sections of fourteen generations each. Three is, of course, a significant number, representing the Trinity and the threefold "body, soul, and spirit" of man.

But what is the significance of the number *fourteen* here? The numerical value of the Hebrew letters in the name "David" add up to fourteen. Matthew was a bookkeeper (as tax collector) and he loved figures.

Incidentally, another characteristic of Matthew's Gospel is systematic arrangement. That is illustrated here in the case of the genealogy.

Why did Matthew begin his great Gospel with a long list of names? Because the Jews, to whom Matthew was writing, would not accept Jesus as their Messiah unless it was first demonstrated to them that He was descended from Abraham and David.

## II. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW:

Matthew 5:17-20

### A. Christ the Fulfiller: v. 17

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." The two main divisions of the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) were "the Law" (the first five books) and "the Prophets" (most of the rest of the Old Testament). Sometimes the total was referred to as "the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus said that He had not come to abolish the Old Testament, but to "fulfill" it. The Greek verb literally means "fill full," and then "fulfill." Both meanings are significant. Christ not only fulfilled the promises and prophecies, as well as types and symbols, of the Old Testament, but He filled them full of spiritual meaning.

"The Hebrew Scriptures were not set aside with the coming of Christianity. Rather, they were given a higher interpretation, which is exactly what is found in verses 21-48. Only by their fulfillment in Christ can the Old Testament writings be understood correctly. Without Him they are incomplete and incomprehensible" (WBC, IV, 32).

### B. Indestructibility of the Law: v. 18

Jesus declared that until heaven and earth passed away not one "jot or one tittle" (KJV) would pass away from the Law "until everything is accomplished" (NIV). The Greek has a different verb here at the end from the one translated "fulfill" in verse 17.

"Jot" and "tittle" probably don't communicate anything intelligible to the American reader today. In the Greek the first of these is *iota*, which is the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet (written like our small "i," but with no dot above it. We sometimes say, "It doesn't make one *iota* of difference." The translation "jot" probably comes from the fact that the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, shaped like a small apostrophe, is called *yodh*.

The Greek word for "tittle" is *keraiia*, which means "horn." It refers to a little stroke or projection on a Hebrew letter that changes it to another, with different meaning.

So the most accurate translation is "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen" (NIV). Edgar Goodspeed gives a striking "American Translation": "not one dotting of an i or crossing of a t."

### C. Breaking or Keeping the Law: v. 19

At first sight, the exact wording of the first part of this verse seems surprising. One would think that a person who broke the law and taught others to do the same would not be "least in the kingdom of heaven" but entirely outside the kingdom.

Probably the best suggestion is that the Greek preposition *en* (in) may be translated "in relation to." From the standpoint of the kingdom, these people would be called "least."

### D. Superior Righteousness: v. 20

This verse is usually recognized as the key verse of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Jesus said that the



righteousness of those in the kingdom must surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

If we want to know what He meant, all we have to do is read carefully verses 21-48. There Jesus gives six illustrations of what the higher righteousness is. He shows that it is primarily a righteousness of inner attitude rather than outward action.

The righteousness of the Pharisees was outward, formal, ceremonial, legalistic. The righteousness that Jesus requires is inward, actual, moral, spiritual. It is a righteousness of love rather than *legalism*. "For the Jew *righteousness* was a slavish adherence to the letter of the Law. For the Christian it is the right attitude of the heart in desiring to do the whole will of God" (WBC, IV, 33).

As Christians we are free to do right, but we must not feel free to do wrong. Floyd Filson puts it this way: "The gospel brings mercy, comfort, and divine help, but it does not cancel the demand of God for faithful and complete obedience to his will" (*A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 84). The Christian life is the higher life in Christ.

### III. THE CALL OF MATTHEW:

Matthew 9:9

"As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him."

In Mark (2:14) and Luke (5:27) this man is called "Levi." That would be his Jewish name; Levi was one of twelve sons of Jacob. Perhaps he took on his Greek name "Matthew" because, as tax collector for the Romans, he was in frequent contact with Gentiles.

Where was he sitting? It is expressed differently in the versions: "the receipt of custom" (KJV), "the place of toll" (ASV), "the tax office" (RSV, NASB), "the tax collector's booth" (NIV). Which is best? Probably the first two are the least likely. The objection to

"tax office" is that it conjures up the picture of a nice office in a modern office building. Where Matthew sat was doubtless in a little *booth* on a busy, narrow street such as one sees in Jerusalem today.

It took a lot of consecration for Matthew to leave his lucrative job and follow Jesus, but he promptly paid the price.

### IV. A DISCIPLE IN THE KINGDOM:

Matthew 13:51-52

#### A. Jesus' Question: v. 51

The Master had just told seven parables of the kingdom. Then He turned to His disciples and asked, "Have you understood all these things?" They replied, "Yes." Doubtless they were sincere, but perhaps also a bit superficial.

#### B. Jesus' Affirmation: v. 52

Jesus encouraged His disciples to use what they had learned. He said that every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom is like the "owner of a house, who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." W. C. Allen writes: "Just so Christ's disciples who had learned from Him the secrets of the kingdom, that is the truths about its near approach, the qualities which befitted those who should enter into it, and the separation between bad and good which would be made at its coming, were to be teachers of others" (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 155).

One possible application today might be that a teacher should use the Old Testament as well as the New. The old truths are fundamental, but sometimes need new interpretations and applications.

### V. THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW:

Matthew 23:1-12

#### A. In Moses' Seat: vv. 1-2

To both the crowds and His disciples Jesus said, "The teachers of the law and



the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." The Greek word for "seat" is *cathedra*, which gives us *cathedral*, a term which should be used only for a church that is the "seat" of a bishop. We say that a man speaks *ex cathedra*—literally "from the seat"—and so by official authority. The Pharisees spoke *ex cathedra* because they sat on Moses' seat.

### B. Failure to Practice: vv. 3-4

On the basis of this, Jesus continued: "So you must obey them and do everything they tell you" (v. 3). Allen makes this helpful observation: "We must suppose that a limitation is to be inferred from 'sit in Moses' seat.' Do all things that they teach, in so far as this is in harmony with the spirit of the Mosaic law" (*Matthew*, p. 244).

Jesus went on to say, "But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach." Allen comments that "in practice their system tended to miss the real righteousness of the Old Testament, and to overlook its true principles, love, mercy, truth, etc. Cf. 12:7. They professed regard for the Old Testament, but neglected the mercy which it taught; 15:4, 5 they so explained away the divine command of filial duty as to sanction the direct contrary; 23:23 they paid great attention to the minuter regulations of the law, but

neglected the great underlying moral principles" (*Matthew*, p. 244).

Even stronger was the charge that Jesus brought against the Pharisees in verse 4: "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." "The *heavy burdens* were the minute, multitudinous rules and regulations with which the scribes had saddled the religion of Israel. There were so many detailed items that the common people could not observe them all. Religion, instead of being a joy and inspiration, had become an unbearable burden. Yet the scribes refused to lighten this load by simplifying the system" (*WBC*, IV, 97).

### C. Outward Show: vv. 5-7

"Everything they do is done for men to see: they make their phylacteries wide and the tassels of their prayer shawls long" (v. 5). At the West Wall (called the Wailing Wall until 1967) one can still see Jews wearing phylacteries and prayer shawls.

The phylacteries "were tiny boxes made from the skin of ceremonially clean animals and worn on the forehead and left arm. The head phylactery had four compartments, each with a passage from the Old Testament (Ex. 13:1-10; 11-16; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21). The arm phylactery contained all four passages in one compartment" (*WBC*, IV, 97-98).

There were other ways in which they showed their pride and self-importance: "They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the market places and to have men call them 'Rabbi'" (vv. 6-7). Instead of seeking God's glory, they were seeking their own glory.

### D. Need for Humility: vv. 8-12

Are the commands of verses 8-10 to be taken literally? No child is to call his own parent "father" or his instructor "teacher"?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What value does the genealogy of Matthew 1 have for us as Christians?
2. What should be our attitude to the law of Moses?
3. Why are we free from the ceremonial law?
4. How can we keep our attitudes righteous?
5. Why did Jesus choose Matthew?
6. Why do we need to "practice what we preach"?

Again we see the necessity of common sense in interpreting Scripture. "These instructions should be taken as warning against a spirit of ostentation and pride, rather than specific rules about the use of technical titles" (*WBC*, IV, 98).

Humility and service are the marks of true piety. Jesus had already emphasized this in 20:25-28; now He reit-

erates it. The greatest person is the one who is willing to be a servant, as Jesus was.

Verse 12 states an important principle of life: "The way up is down." For in going down in humble service to others, we learn lessons of true living that we could never learn any other way. If we want to go up, we must first go down in prayer and humility.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Some people express themselves this way: "Thank God, I'm not under law but under grace. That's a lot easier."

This may reflect shallow thinking. Actually, the demands of Jesus are far higher than those of Moses. The old law said, "Watch your actions"; Jesus said, "Watch your attitudes."

Under the law one had to be careful

what he said and did. Under grace we have to be careful what we think and desire. It is far harder to guard and guide one's inner attitudes than one's outer actions. We have to pass the scrutiny of an all-seeing God, not just the gaze of people's eyes. But we have the Holy Spirit to help us keep our attitudes, motives, and thoughts pleasing to God.

December 14, 1980

## JOHN PREPARES THE WAY

DEVOTIONAL READING	Isaiah 7:10-15
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Preparing the Way</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Preparing the Way</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Malachi 3:1-5; 4:5-6; Isaiah 40:1-11; Matthew 3:1-12; 11:7-15; 17:9-13 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 3:1-12 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Prepare the way of the LORD, make his paths straight. Matthew 3:3</i>
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Getting Ready to Live for Jesus</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Malachi 3:1-6; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 40:1-11; Matthew 3:1-12; 11:7-15; 17:9-13 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 3:1-12 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>O come, let us worship and bow down. Psalm 95:6</i>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>Dec. 8 M.:</b> The Messenger of Good News. Mal. 3:1-5 <b>Dec. 9 T.:</b> The Day of Hope Comes. Mal. 4:1-6 <b>Dec. 10 W.:</b> The Voice in the Wilderness. Isa. 40:1-11 <b>Dec. 11 T.:</b> A Song of Thanksgiving. Isa. 11:1-3 <b>Dec. 12 F.:</b> The Roar of the Nations. Isa. 17:9-13 <b>Dec. 13 S.:</b> Immanuel Promised. Isa. 7:10-15 <b>Dec. 14 S.:</b> Prepare the Way. Matt. 3:1-12
LESSON AIM	To show John the Baptist's ministry as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> about A.D. 26 <b>Place:</b> the Judean Desert
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>John Prepares the Way</b> <b>I. John the Baptist's Ministry:</b> Matthew 3:1-10 A. In the Desert of Judea: v. 1 B. His Main Message: v. 2 C. Preparing the Way: v. 3 D. His Clothing and Food: v. 4 E. His Popularity: v. 5

- F. Confession and Baptism: v. 6
- G. Warning to Pharisees and Sadducees: vv. 7-10

## II. Prediction of Jesus' Ministry: Matthew 3:11-12

- A. Contrasting Baptisms: v. 11
- B. A Ministry of Judgment: v. 12

## III. Jesus' Eulogy of John: Matthew 11:7-15

- A. The Appointed Messenger: vv. 7-10
- B. Greatest of Men: v. 11
- C. Culmination of Old Regime: vv. 12-15

## IV. The New Elijah: Matthew 17:9-13

- A. The Disciples' Question: vv. 9-10
- B. Jesus' Answer: vv. 11-13

### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

The ministry of John the Baptist is treated with importance in all four Gospels. Mark and John do not say anything of Jesus' birth and childhood; the so-called infancy narratives are found only in Matthew and Luke. But both Mark and John record at some length the ministry of the Baptist (Mark 1:1-8; John 1:6-9, 19-37), an essential ministry of preparation for Jesus' own ministry to the Jewish nation.

Today we call it "laying the groundwork," and so-called "laymen" can have an active part in this. We should never minimize the importance of people in the pew in preparing the way for revival in the church. Many great spiritual renewals have been due to some person or persons who engaged in earnest, burdened prayer over a period of time.

There is a sense in which we are all called upon to "prepare the way of the Lord." Let us not fail in our obligation.

### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

Many worthwhile projects fail for lack of preparation. The idea was good, but the planning was not adequate.

Billy Graham's crusades have demonstrated the importance of preparation. Months before the great evangelist comes to a city, the "forerunners" arrive and set up an office. Pastors are contacted, counselors trained, publicity prepared, and—most essentially—much prayer generated.

Supportive ministries are what young people can become involved in. One of the best ways to grow spiritually is to become busy in helping others. Young people are the best agents for winning youth to Christ and the church. Let's get involved!

### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. One way of getting ready to live for Jesus is going regularly to church and Sunday school.
2. There we learn more about Jesus.
3. We also get help from others who are living for Him.
4. Worshiping with others deepens our own devotion.



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY:

Matthew 3:1-10

#### A. In the Desert of Judea: v. 1

"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea." This is an area stretching from Bethlehem and Jerusalem on the west to the Dead Sea and the Jordan River on the east, a distance of about twenty miles. It is barren, rocky, and hilly. That is why the New International Version uses "desert" rather than "wilderness." The latter term is normally used today for an uninhabited, wooded area. Trees and grass are very scarce in the Judean desert.

John came "preaching." The Greek verb is *kerysso*, which comes from the noun *keryx*, "a herald." The noun "was used for the herald of a military commander who gave an important announcement, or for the herald of a king who made a proclamation. John was God's herald, proclaiming an important message. A herald does not voice his own words; he speaks for another" (Ralph Earle, *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 19-20).

#### B. His Main Message: v. 2

John had one main emphasis in his preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." It is interesting to note that Jesus began His public ministry with exactly the same words (4:17). This was the message the Jewish nation needed most to hear. The greatest need of the hour was for repentance, so that the kingdom that was "near" might actually come in the hearts of the people.

What is repentance? We have already noted in recent lessons that the Greek word for "repent" means "change one's mind" with regard to sin and salvation, one's self and God. The popular idea of repentance is feeling sorry. But the biblical concept includes the intellect and the will as well as the emo-

tions. And the first two are far more important than the last.

Mark, Luke, and John all use the expression "kingdom of God" but never "kingdom of heaven." Why does Matthew prefer the latter? Matthew was writing to Jews, and the Jews sought to avoid the use of the name *God* out of an exaggerated sense of reverence for the name rather than the person. They used substitutes, such as "heaven"—not "God wills it," but "heaven wills it." To encourage the Jews to read his Gospel, Matthew bowed to this custom.

The "kingdom of heaven" refers to God's rule of human hearts and lives. It is first of all an inner, spiritual kingdom, but ultimately, at Christ's second coming, it will become an outward kingdom as well.

#### C. Preparing the Way: v. 3

In connection with the ministry of John the Baptist, all four Gospels quote from the great fortieth chapter of Isaiah. Luke (3:4-6) gives the fullest quotation (Isa. 40:3-5). Matthew (3:3), Mark (1:3), and John (1:23) quote only a part of verse 3. All four Gospels indicate that the prophecy is from Isaiah.

John the Baptist was a voice calling out in the desert. "Prepare the way for the Lord" sums up his mission. He was called and commissioned to be the forerunner of the Messiah and he did a great job. The crowds were alerted to the fact that they needed to repent and straighten out their crooked "paths" if the kingdom was going to come.

#### D. His Clothing and Food: v. 4

"John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist." Matthew Henry observes: "They, who expected the Messiah as a temporal prince, would think that his forerunner must come in great pomp and splendour, that his equipage should be very magnificent and gay; but

it proves quite contrary" (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, V. 22).

The cloth made of camel's hair would be rough and "scratchy." For this reason it was worn by ascetics in ancient times. A leather belt held the loose garment around his waist. Elijah, whose role John was now filling, is described as "a man with a garment of hair and a leather belt around his waist" (II Kings 1:8). Both men had rough clothes and rugged personalities. Both men had the same mission: to call the nation back to God.

We also read, "His food was locusts and wild honey." Some have tried to dilute this statement by saying that John ate locust blossoms from the trees, and that the "honey" was the sweet sap of trees. But almost all commentators agree that insects and bee's honey are meant. Locusts were rated as "clean" food in the Mosaic law (Lev. 11:22) and are still eaten by many people in the Middle East. In fact, one can buy dried locusts in many supermarkets in the United States, as I learned one day in class when one of my students laid a dried locust on my desk and challenged me to eat it. I did!

It should go without saying that locusts and bees abound in Palestine. This was the cheapest fare John could have, and he made the most of it.

#### E. His Popularity: v. 5

"Then Jerusalem was going out to him, all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan" (NASB). This is a strong statement, but that is what the Greek says. Similarly Mark writes, "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him" (1:5). It would seem that the people sensed that a great prophet of God, like Elijah of old, was among them, and they flocked to hear him. It was a crucial moment for the Jews.

We must remember that these people from Jerusalem had to walk some twenty miles down the Jericho Road to reach the Jordan River. Worse still, they had no cars to drive back up

the hill. Instead they had to trudge up the road that wound among the hills, ascending nearly 4,000 feet, for Jerusalem was at an elevation of about 2,500 feet, while the Jordan as it flowed into the Dead Sea was 1,300 feet below sea level. The people were eager to hear John, and they paid a real price for the privilege.

#### F. Confession and Baptism: v. 6

"And they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins" (NASB). Probably most people who are baptized today in adulthood make a public confession of Christ. But John the Baptist went further than this: He would not baptize people unless they confessed their sins. The tragedy of our day is that many people who have received water baptism and joined the church are still living Christless lives, with no visible change in conduct. John demanded repentance and confession of sin.

#### G. Warning to Pharisees and Sadducees: vv. 7-10

It is surprising to learn that "many of the Pharisees and Sadducees" were "coming to where he was baptizing." What drew them here? Certainly curiosity and probably a desire to check on the validity of the situation. They were the religious leaders of the nation, and they had to keep track of what was going on. We know that not many of them were baptized. In Luke 7:30 we are told, "But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John."

The name *Pharisee* means "Separatists." The Pharisees prided themselves on living "unworldly" lives and on being very strict in keeping all the commandments in the law, as well as observing "the tradition of the elders," but they were harsh and legalistic.

On the other hand, the Sadducees were the liberals of that day. They denied angels, spirits, and resurrection

from the dead (Acts 23:8). They tended to be wealthy and worldly-minded.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the two main sects in Judaism at that time. The Pharisees controlled the synagogues in all the towns, whereas the Sadducees controlled the priesthood and the temple at Jerusalem. But John said to both groups: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

These seem like harsh words. "But John saw through the thin veneer of their casual curiosity, and he discerned a deep-seated spirit of deception underneath. The Pharisees and Sadducees were like snakes hiding in the grass, waiting to bite the people rather than to help them. And like vipers fleeing before a roaring brush fire, they sought to flee from the wrath to come. But they were unwilling to repent and confess their sins; they probably claimed they had no sins to confess" (WBC, IV, 21).

John went on to say: "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (v. 8)—that is, give evidence in your lives of genuine repentance in your hearts. This they were not doing.

He warned them against thinking, "We have Abraham as our father" by saying, "out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (v. 9). Paul emphasized that all who believe in Jesus are the spiritual children of Abraham (Rom. 4:11, 16).

Then John declared, "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (v. 10). The Messiah was coming to bring salvation to repentant sinners, but those who refused to repent and be saved would find themselves under divine judgment.

Jesus later used this same figure in the parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), which symbolized the Jewish nation. He also repeated these words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:19). "This is a serious warning that if one fails to produce the good fruit of Christian character, he will ultimately be cut

down and cast into fire" (WBC, IV, 21). This seems to be a reference to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

## II. PREDICTION OF JESUS'

### MINISTRY:

Matthew 3:11-12

#### A. Contrasting Baptisms: v. 11

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"—that is, with a fiery, cleansing baptism of the Spirit. And this is exactly what every human heart needs!

John baptized with water; Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. In the light of this truth, so vividly stated here, it is difficult to understand why the church at large has so strongly emphasized the former and neglected the latter. Water baptism has been practiced by various religions. The Jews baptized Gentile converts to Judaism as a sign of washing away their ceremonial uncleanness. The distinctive Christian baptism is the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

#### B. A Ministry of Judgment: v. 12

This verse seems to be a picture of the final judgment. John said of Jesus: "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable [Greek, *asbestos*] fire." May that not be our fate!

## III. JESUS' EULOGY OF JOHN:

Matthew 11:7-15

#### A. The Appointed Messenger: vv. 7-10

John the Baptist had been put in prison for reproving Herod Antipas for stealing his brother Philip's wife (Matt. 14:3-4). It would not be long now until his execution (14:10). No wonder John was in low spirits.



Furthermore, Jesus was not fulfilling the expected messianic role. Instead of delivering the nation from foreign rule and setting up His throne in Jerusalem, He was healing the sick and preaching to the poor.

Finally John sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (v. 3). After answering their question in a meaningful way (vv. 4-6), Jesus turned and addressed the crowd. He asked the people what they had gone out into the desert to see—"A reed swayed by the wind? . . . A man dressed in fine clothes? . . . A prophet?" Then in answer to His own question He said, "Yes, and more than a prophet" (vv. 7-9).

Then He identified John the Baptist by quoting from Malachi 3:1:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you."

The Hebrew for "my messenger" is *malachi*, which was the name of the prophet himself. But here the reference is to a future messenger. Jesus applied the passage to John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Him, the Messiah.

#### B. Greatest of Men: v. 11

Jesus declared that "among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist," but added, "Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." How? Because he has the greater privilege of living this side of Calvary. John belonged to the old dispensation, announced the new, and then faded out of the picture.

#### C. Culmination of Old Regime: vv. 12-15

What is the meaning of verse 12? William Barclay suggests this: "Only the man who is desperately in earnest,

only the man in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution will in the end enter into it" (*The Gospel of Matthew*, II, 9).

Verse 13 indicates that John's ministry was the culmination of the Old Testament regime. Then He made a startling statement: "And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come" (v. 14). The reference is to Malachi's prophecy of the coming of Elijah, which we shall discuss in the following paragraphs.

### IV. THE NEW ELIJAH: Matthew 17:9-13

#### A. The Disciples' Question: vv. 9-10

As Jesus and the three disciples of the inner circle were coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, the Master told them: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (v. 9). But the disciples had a question: "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" (v. 10). The rabbis based their teaching on Malachi 4:5, which reads: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes."

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did John preach by the Jordan River?
2. What did John say the people must do? Why?
3. Why is confession of sin necessary before baptism?
4. Why are most churches silent about the baptism with the Holy Spirit?
5. What part should religious leaders play in preparation for revival?
6. Why does God use a variety of types of personality?



**B. Jesus' Answer: vv. 11-13**

The Master affirmed that the rabbis were right (v. 11). Then He announced: "But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man

is going to suffer at their hands" (v. 12). John had been imprisoned and finally executed.

Characteristically, Matthew adds, "Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist" (v. 13). Now everything was clear.

**CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

Preparation is important! Many years ago I was speaking in a western city. I noticed signs on front lawns, announcing the dates for a coming Billy Graham crusade, three months away.

On inquiry, I found that the planning committee hoped to have a sign on the front lawn of every owner who would permit it, throughout the sizable city. Furthermore, I was told that al-

ready about seven hundred weekly block prayer meetings had been started, and they expected to have a thousand of them functioning before Billy Graham arrived.

No wonder we heard later that the crusade swept the city! If we want great results, we must pay the price of careful, prayerful preparation.

December 21, 1980

## GOD SENDS THE SAVIOR

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Isaiah 9:2-7

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God Sends the Savior*

**Youth Topic:** *Accepting the Savior*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 1:18—2:23

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 1:18-25

**Memory Verse:** *You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.* Matthew 1:21

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Celebrating Jesus' Birth*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 1:18—2:23

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 2:1-15

**Memory Verse:** *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* John 15:12

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Dec. 15 M.:** Jesus' Birth Announced. Luke 1:26-38

**Dec. 16 T.:** Mary Sings with Gladness. Luke 1:46-55

**Dec. 17 W.:** Born in a Manger. Luke 2:1-7

**Dec. 18 T.:** Angels and Shepherds Praise God. Luke 2:8-20

**Dec. 19 F.:** Simeon Sees God's Salvation. Luke 2:22-23

**Dec. 20 S.:** Wise Men Worship. Matt. 2:1-11

**Dec. 21 S.:** God's Son—Prince of Peace. Isa. 9:2-7

LESSON AIM

To make the true meaning of Christmas more clear to us.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 4 B.C.

**Place:** Nazareth and Bethlehem

LESSON OUTLINE

**God Sends the Savior**

**I. Announcement to Joseph:** Matthew 1:18-25

A. A Shocking Discovery: v. 18

B. A Compassionate Decision: v. 19

C. A Significant Dream: v. 20

D. An Amazing Declaration: v. 21

E. A Fulfilled Decree: v. 22

F. A Divine Disclosure: v. 23

G. An Obedient Disciple: v. 24

H. A Devout Discernment: v. 25

**II. The Visit of the Magi: Matthew 2:1-12**

- A. The Quest in Jerusalem: vv. 1-2
- B. Herod's Inquiry: vv. 3-6
- C. Herod's Instructions: vv. 7-8
- D. The Fulfillment in Bethlehem: vv. 9-12

**III. The Escape to Egypt: Matthew 2:13-18**

- A. The Divine Command: v. 13
- B. The Quick Obedience: vv. 14-15
- C. The Slaughter of the Innocent: vv. 16-18

**IV. The Return to Nazareth: Matthew 2:19-23**

- A. The Divine Instruction: vv. 19-20
- B. The Choice of Nazareth: vv. 21-23

The first two chapters of both Matthew and Luke contain what are called the infancy narratives—stories relating to the birth and childhood of Jesus. A careful reading of these will show practically no overlapping of the two accounts. Matthew gives everything from the standpoint of Joseph, Luke from the standpoint of Mary.

Matthew has only four incidents of Jesus' childhood, as indicated in our lesson outline today. Luke's longer account has ten incidents. They are:

1. Announcement of the birth of John the Baptist (1:5-25)
2. Announcement to Mary of the birth of Jesus (1:26-38)
3. Mary's visit to Elizabeth (1:39-56)
4. Birth of John the Baptist (1:57-80)
5. Birth of Jesus (2:1-7)
6. Visit of the shepherds (2:8-20)
7. Circumcision of Jesus (2:21)
8. Jesus' presentation in the temple (2:22-40)
9. The boy Jesus in the temple (2:41-50)
10. Youth in Nazareth (2:51-52)

The difference in selection is due to the purposes of the two Gospels. Matthew is presenting Jesus to the Jews as their King—hence the male, royal emphasis. Luke is presenting Jesus to the Greeks as the Son of Man—hence the emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, His mother, and His relatives.

Accepting the Savior is by far the most important experience in every young person's life. Without this, life is a failure and eternity is outer darkness. With this, life is a glorious adventure and eternity is heaven forever with our loving Lord. We can't afford to miss it!

God is concerned for our salvation; that is why He sent His Son. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings about our new birth into the family of God.

Satan tried to bring about the death of the child Jesus in Bethlehem, and he tries to cause spiritual death in everyone who is born again. But God will protect us from his cruel

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

hatred if we will keep close to Christ, reading our Bibles and praying every day.

1. Christmas is a celebration of God's love for us.
2. We give Christmas gifts because Jesus was God's gift to us.
3. We give to those we love, because God loved us.
4. We give to those in need because Jesus came to help everyone who needed Him.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. ANNOUNCEMENT TO JOSEPH: Matthew 1:18-25

#### A. A Shocking Discovery: v. 18

Matthew was a tax collector, one who kept books. So he begins his account in a very businesslike way: "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about."

We naturally feel that Calvary is more important than Christmas, that it is the death of Christ rather than His birth that brings us salvation. But we must remember that His death could never have taken place without His birth. Christmas is important!

"His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph." The Greek verb for "betrothed" (KJV) is found in the New Testament only here and in Luke 1:27; 2:5. Why not simply translate it "engaged" (RSV): Why the long, round-about rendering of the New International Version?

There is an important reason. In our culture engagement is not a very binding agreement. Many young people have been engaged to several individuals before finally marrying one of them.

Not so among the Jews of that day. It took a formal divorce to break what we would call an engagement. That is why Joseph is called "her husband" (v. 19) and Mary "thy wife" (v. 20) and "his wife" (v. 24)—all this before the wedding! For it is stated here in verse 18 that this all took place "before they came together"—that is, lived together in the same house as man and wife. So

the terms "husband" and "wife" are used here in a different way from what we use them now.

Before the wedding, Mary "was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." Of course, neither Joseph nor anyone else (except Mary, and possibly her parents) knew that it was "through the Holy Spirit." All that Joseph—and everybody else in the little village of Nazareth—knew was that this young, unmarried woman was obviously pregnant.

What a shocking discovery for Joseph! Here was a godly young woman, as everybody believed, pledged to be married to a godly young man. Inevitably he would be considered guilty by many. Although he knew that he was innocent, what about Mary? He had trusted her implicitly. What had happened?

It would seem to us that Mary should have shared with Joseph the announcement of the angel to her (Luke 1:26-38). But we can understand what a delicate situation it was, and we can appreciate her hesitancy in talking to him about it. However, she could have saved him hours of agony if she *had* told him. For there was only one conclusion he could draw, and that was that she had been untrue to him.

#### B. A Compassionate Decision: v. 19

"Joseph her husband was a righteous man." In the Old Testament con-



text, which carries over here, "righteous man" meant a strict observer of the law of Moses. And the law clearly stated that if a "virgin pledged to be married" had relations with another man she was to be stoned (Deut. 22:23-24).

But Joseph loved Mary, and he "did not want to expose her to public disgrace" before the people of the town. And so "he had in mind to divorce her quietly." This would have required a certificate of divorce (Deut. 24:1). But he wanted to do it all as quietly as possible, to save Mary.

### C. A Significant Dream: v. 20

After Joseph had reflected thus, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream." The exact Greek phrase for "in a dream" occurs five times in the first two chapters of Matthew (1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22). In the Old Testament and at the beginning of the New we find God frequently speaking to people in dreams. Now He usually speaks to us by the Holy Spirit. The angel's announcement to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) seems to have been more direct than that to Joseph, probably because she had greater need of certainty.

The angel addressed Joseph as "son of David." It was only because Joseph was descended directly from David that Jesus could be accepted by the Jews as the Messiah, "the son of David." That is, His legal descent was through His foster father.

Joseph had received a shocking surprise; now he received a very comforting one. The angel said to him, "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." So Joseph received the same message from heaven as had Mary a few months earlier (Luke 1:35). These are the two outstanding statements on the virgin birth. Jesus was a man because He was born of Mary. But He was also the Son of God because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Unless He had been both, He could not have become our Savior.

### D. An Amazing Declaration: v. 21

The angel further told Joseph, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." The Greek name *Jesus* is equivalent to the Hebrew *Joshua*. Both mean "Yahweh saves." This is the only place in the New Testament where the meaning of this name is given. Werner Foerster writes: "Up to the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. the name . . . *Jesous* was very common among the Jews" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, III, 285). Then it was dropped, because of rejection of Christianity.

Why the name Jesus? "Because he will save his people from their sins." Who were "his people"? Henry Alford says: "In the primary sense, *the Jews*, of whom alone Joseph could have understood the words: but in the larger sense, all who believe on Him" (*The Greek Testament*, I, 7).

The Jews of Jesus' day expected the Messiah to bring them deliverance from their oppressors—in this case, the Romans. But God had a higher purpose in sending His Son: It was to save people "from their sins." That is the most important deliverance that people need.

### E. A Fulfilled Decree: v. 22

Here we find the first of many statements in the Gospel of Matthew that events connected with Jesus were a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The formula found here for quoting the Old Testament occurs a dozen times in this Gospel, more frequently than in any other book of the New Testament. It confirms the divine inspiration of the older Scriptures: The Lord spoke through His prophets.

### F. A Divine Disclosure: v. 23

This verse is a direct quotation of Isaiah 7:14 in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament made around 200 B. C.). It should go without

saying that there has been only one virgin birth in history—that of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew of Isaiah 7:14 has *almah*. The Septuagint translated this as *parthenos*, which definitely means “virgin.”

The son of the virgin would be called “Immanuel.” The meaning of this Hebrew word is explained: “God with us,” a beautiful description of the Incarnation. There were many ways that God was with His people in Old Testament times—in the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, in the Holy of Holies, and in various other ways. But now something utterly unique in human history was to happen: The eternal Son of God would be born into this world as a human being and live a visible life among His contemporaries. And He still is one of us.

### G. An Obedient Disciple: v. 24

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.” There was no doubting or disputing—just believing and obeying. We should always remember that obedience is the proof and visible evidence of faith. And Joseph’s obedience made possible the fulfillment of the divine purpose. God’s will was carried out through man’s cooperation. What a challenge to us!

Joseph risked his reputation among the people of Nazareth when he took Mary. But he was willing to undergo reproach and slander in order to obey the Lord.

### H. A Devout Discernment: v. 25

Wisely Joseph refrained from having any marriage relations with his wife until Jesus was born. He had a proper sense of reverence for who Jesus would be. This verse implies that Joseph did begin marriage relations after the birth of Jesus. There is no support whatever in the Scriptures for the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

## II. THE VISIT OF THE MAGI:

Matthew 2:1-12

### A. The Quest in Jerusalem: vv. 1-2

“After [so the Greek] Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea [Luke tells how this happened (2:1-7)] during the time of King Herod [Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.)] Magi from the east came to Jerusalem” (v. 1).

Why the change from “wise men” (KJV) to “Magi” (NASB, NIV): The Greek says *magoi* (Anglicized “Magi”). In Acts 13:6 and 8 this same word is translated “sorcerer”! We get our word *magician* from it. One of the meanings of the word was “one who practiced magical arts.” So to say that these Magi were “wise” in a religious sense is hardly justified.

Gerhard Delling says that there is no means of determining whether these men were “specifically Babylonian astrologers or astrologers in general.” He adds: “The former is more likely, since it is only in Babylon, by contact with the exiles, that the *magoi* would acquire an interest in the Jewish king (Messiah). *Magos* here means the ‘possessor of special (secret) wisdom,’ especially concerning the meaning of the course of the stars and its interconnection with world events” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, 358).

In Jerusalem the Magi (pronounced *may'-ji*) asked: “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” (v. 2). Modern astronomers claim that there were rare conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn about 6 B.C., and this may have alerted these astrologers. Then a bright, new “star” appeared in the sky, and they followed it to Palestine.

### A. Herod’s Inquiry: vv. 3-6

The Magi naturally came to Jerusalem, the capital city, to look for the newborn “king.” They expected him

to be born in the palace, but He was born in a manger at Bethlehem.

They doubtless expected to find a lot of excitement at Jerusalem. Instead, no one knew what they were talking about.

Herod the Great, however, was very much interested. He was "king of the Jews," and he didn't want anybody usurping his throne! In fact, the whole city was disturbed about it (v. 3).

So Herod called together "all the chief priests" (Sadducees) and "teachers of the law" (Pharisees) and asked them where the Messiah (Greek, *Christos*) was to be born (v. 4). They were well acquainted with their Scriptures (our Old Testament) and quickly replied, "In Bethlehem in Judea" (v. 5), a small town about six miles south of Jerusalem. They quoted the messianic prophecy in Micah 5:2 in support of this (v. 6).

### C. Herod's Instructions: vv. 7-8

"Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star appeared" (v. 7). He evidently assumed—probably correctly—that the Messiah was born exactly at that time.

Herod then told the Magi to go to Bethlehem and search for the child. When they found him, they were to report back to Herod, "so that I too may

go and worship him" (v. 8). Herod of course had other intentions!

### D. The Fulfillment in Bethlehem: vv. 9-12

Obediently the Magi headed south. To their great joy (v. 10) they found the new star leading them again (v. 9).

Finally they received the fulfillment of their quest: They found "the child" in a "house." (v. 1). All Christmas portrayals of wise men kneeling at a manger to see a baby are completely unscriptural. It was the shepherds who were there (Luke 2:16). The Magi had spent many months, perhaps a year or so, organizing their caravan and making the long trek from Mesopotamia. By that time Joseph, Mary, and the "child" Jesus were living in a house.

Another misconception is that there were "three wise men" and that they were "kings." There is not one shred of evidence for this. Probably the idea arose from the fact that the Magi presented three kinds of gifts: gold, incense, and myrrh. We have no idea how many Magi there were.

Again God spoke "in a dream" (v. 12). He warned the Magi not to go back to Herod. So they "returned to their country by another route."

## III. THE ESCAPE TO EGYPT: Matthew 2:13-18

### A. The Divine Command: v. 13

Once more Joseph had a dream. This time it was an angel who told him to "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

### B. The Quick Obedience: vv. 14-15

Responding to the urgency of the situation, Joseph "got up, took the child and his mother during the night [so as to avoid detection (no street lights then)] and left for Egypt, where he stayed

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the virgin birth?
2. Do dreams ever have significance today?
3. What does "Immanuel" mean to us?
4. Why does Matthew tell the story of the Magi?
5. Can God still circumvent the purposes of cruel rulers?
6. Why do we need to carefully seek God's guidance?



until the death of Herod." Again Matthew cites an Old Testament passage (Hos. 11:1). "Out of Egypt I called my son" had reference first to the coming of the Israelites out of Egypt, and then it is applied to Christ. This is what we call the "telescopic principle" of prophecy.

### C. The Slaughter of the Innocent: vv. 16-18

"When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under." This cruel despot had killed three of his sons so they wouldn't take his throne, and his favorite wife. So this massacre was typical of him. Once more Matthew quotes a prophecy, this time Jeremiah 31:15.

## IV. THE RETURN TO NAZARETH: Matthew 2:19-23

### A. The Divine Instruction: vv. 19-20

Finally Herod the Great died (in 4 B.C.). Then Joseph had another dream, telling him to take the child Jesus and

his mother back to the land of Israel. Evidently Joseph had not yet heard of Herod's death.

### B. The Choice of Nazareth: vv. 21-23

Again Joseph obeyed the divine command. But when he reached Palestine he learned that "Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod" (v. 22). So he was afraid to go back to Bethlehem. Why? Because Archelaus was a very cruel man like his father. He ruled only ten years (4 B.C.—A.D. 6). Then the Jews made such a strong complaint against him that he was recalled to Rome.

Joseph's fears were confirmed by a dream, instructing him to go to Galilee rather than Judea. So he went a hundred miles north and settled down in Nazareth. From Luke 2:4 we know that this was his hometown.

Once more Matthew refers to the Old Testament: "So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'" There is no footnote for this. Perhaps the reference is to the Hebrew *nazir*, "branch" or "shoot," in Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The Magi followed the star to Judea. Then they naturally assumed that the "king of the Jews" would be born in the royal palace at Jerusalem; so they went there. This brought King Herod into the picture, with the final result that many boys in Bethlehem were killed.

Would this massacre have been avoided if the Magi had just followed the

star, instead of letting their own thoughts guide them? Perhaps so.

Following the star is a symbol of following the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives today. Many a Christian has neglected to pray and seek the Spirit's guidance. Instead he has used his own judgment—sometimes with tragic results. Let's follow the Star!



December 28, 1980

## JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

DEVOTIONAL READING	Ephesians 1:3-14
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Jesus Begins His Ministry</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Beginning a Ministry</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 3:13—4:25</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 3:13-17; 4:17-25</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 4:17</i></p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>When Jesus Said No</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 3:13—4:25</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 4:1-11</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. Matthew 26:41</i></p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>Dec. 22 M.: Jesus Is the Son of God. John 1:29-34</p> <p>Dec. 23 T.: A Wedding Miracle. John 2:1-11</p> <p>Dec. 24 W.: Opposing Corrupt Practices. John 2:13-22</p> <p>Dec. 25 T.: Confidence in Jesus' Word. John 4:46-54</p> <p>Dec. 26 F.: Jesus Declares His Mission. Luke 4:16-21</p> <p>Dec. 27 S.: Preparing Fishers of Men. Luke 5:1-11</p> <p>Dec. 28 S.: Faithful Though Tempted. Matthew 4:1-11</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us see our responsibility as ministers of Christ.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> A.D. 26 or 27</p> <p><b>Place:</b> the Desert of Judea and the Lake of Galilee</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Jesus Begins His Ministry</b></p> <p><b>I. The Baptism of Jesus:</b> Matthew 3:13-17</p> <p>A. Coming to John: v. 13</p> <p>B. John's Objection: v. 14</p> <p>C. Jesus' Reply: v. 15</p> <p>D. Descent of the Spirit: v. 16</p> <p>E. Voice from Heaven: v. 17</p> <p><b>II. The Temptation of Jesus:</b> Matthew 4:1-11</p> <p>A. The First Temptation: vv. 1-4</p> <p>B. The Second Temptation: vv. 5-7</p> <p>C. The Third Temptation: vv. 8-11</p>

**III. The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry: Matthew 4:12-17**

- A. A New Location: vv. 12-13
- B. Fulfillment of Prophecy: vv. 14-16
- C. Main Message: v. 17

**IV. The Call of the First Disciples: Matthew 4:18-22**

- A. Peter and Andrew: vv. 18-20
- B. James and John: vv. 21-22

**V. The Expanding Ministry: Matthew 4:23-25**

- A. A Threefold Ministry: v. 23
- B. Healing the Sick: v. 24
- C. Large Crowds from Everywhere: v. 25

Two weeks ago we studied about the external preparation for Jesus' ministry in the preaching of John the Baptist. Today we turn our attention to the preparation of Jesus Himself for His task.

It was twofold. First, there was the public baptism by John at the Jordan, perhaps in the presence of a large crowd. That was followed by His private temptation by Satan, alone in the desert.

Both were essential—for Him and for us. We should submit to the accepted ritual in our religious group, as Jesus did in His. Public confession has its important place, but private testing is just as essential.

Jesus entered into the religious structure of His day, but then He added a new spiritual dimension to it. Our responsibility today is not to destroy the form, but to put new content into it. All of us should make spiritual additions to the fellowship in which we worship.

Young people who know that they are born again should submit to baptism as a public confession of their faith. It signifies—or should signify—that they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Young people are especially subject to temptation. We should be encouraged to know that Jesus Himself was tempted and came off victorious. We can, too, if we follow His example of obedience to the Word of God.

This means that we need to memorize many passages in the Bible, so that we can recall them readily when we need them. Young people should memorize whole chapters of the Bible. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is our best weapon against Satan (Eph. 6:17).

1. Every human being is tempted at times.
2. Satan tempts us with bad suggestions.
3. Other children tempt us to do wrong.
4. We must be willing to stand alone in doing right.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS:

Matthew 3:13-17

#### A. Coming to John: v. 13

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John." Jesus had spent His childhood and youth in the little village of Nazareth, nestled high in the hills of Galilee (2:23; Luke 2:39-40, 51-52). Now the time had come for Him to begin His public career. Luke tells us, "Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry" (3:23). This was in perfect keeping with the custom of that day.

We cannot be certain as to exactly where Jesus was baptized. It was obviously outside of Galilee, and probably to the south. The traditional site near Jericho is perhaps not far from correct. The fact that the temptation took place in the Judean desert would favor this general location.

#### B. John's Objection: v. 14

"But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'" John's attitude is entirely understandable. He was confronted by a candidate who had no need for repentance, confession, or cleansing. I Peter 2:22 says that Jesus "committed no sin."

#### C. Jesus' Reply: v. 15

"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." The result? "Then John consented."

The word *righteousness* here probably has its Jewish sense of meeting all the requirements of the law, which included ceremonial cleansing with water. Or, to put it in more modern terms, it means "religious duty."

The question has often been raised as to why Jesus, who had never sinned, needed to be baptized. Here we have His own answer: He had to fulfill all righteousness.

The full significance of His act is tremendous. "The Incarnation was more than a coming in physical flesh. It was an actual entrance into the human race. In so doing Jesus identified Himself with all humanity. Though He never sinned, He united Himself in a real way with sinful men. He did not place Himself upon a pedestal, but plunged into the arena of moral conflict. He became one with us in our lowly estate. The climax of Christ's identification with sinful humanity came when He hung on the Cross in man's place, condemned as a criminal. That is the mystery of divine redemption. Only Eternal Love incarnate could have done it."

"All this explains why Jesus was baptized. He would go all the way as the Representative of man in his sin and deep need. He stood there that day, not by Himself or with John only, but with the crowd. Here was the Incarnation in action, divine Love revealed" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 22-23).

#### D. Descent of the Spirit: v. 16

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the river." Though this does not prove that He was immersed—He could have been just standing in the river—it certainly implies it.

"At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him." Who is the "he" who saw? We are not told. Some think it was just Jesus. But John's Gospel indicates that the descent of the Spirit "in bodily form" (Luke 3:22) was seen by John the Baptist and that it was a sign to him that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:32-34). None of the four accounts says explicitly that the dove-like form was seen by the crowd.

#### E. Voice from Heaven: v. 17

"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased." The same

words came when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, and were heard by the three disciples.

This incident is important for one special reason: It is the first completely clear revelation of the Trinity in the Bible. We have hints and suggestions in several places in the Old Testament, but no explicit statement. Here, however, the Trinity is plainly revealed. As Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and the voice of the Father called from heaven, "This is my Son." Here we clearly see Father, Son, and Holy Spirit revealed as three distinct persons, even though in essence they are the same—eternal Deity.

## II. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS: Matthew 4:1-11

### A. The First Temptation: vv. 1-4

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil" (v. 1). This was the Desert of Judea, which stretched up from the Jordan River (some 1,300 feet below sea level) to the high plateau (about 2,500 feet above sea level), on which sat the city of Jerusalem. It was a bleak, forsaken area—a fitting place for fierce temptation.

The Holy Spirit had come on Jesus at His baptism, and the voice from heaven had honored Him. Now the Spirit was leading Him purposefully into a severe time of testing. Seasoned saints know that sometimes our highest moments of spiritual blessing are in preparation for our severest trials. In fact, I have often found that the Lord has prepared me for a particularly trying day by special inspiration and uplift in my morning devotions—a wonderful expression of divine love!

The Greek word for "devil" is *diabolos*, which means "slanderer." Mark (1:13) uses *Satan*, "adversary." Both terms well describe the arch foe of God and man. He did not hesitate to tempt even the Son of God in human flesh.

Jesus fasted "forty days and forty

nights" (v. 2). "This is the proverbial number for a period of probation. Moses was on Mount Sinai 'forty days and forty nights' (Ex. 24:18) receiving the Law. He, too, fasted during this entire period (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:9). Great leaders pay a great price. Both Moses and Jesus were probably sustained by divinely given strength. . . . The children of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land (Num. 14:33)" (WBC, IV, 24).

It may seem surprising to read that "after fasting forty days and forty nights," Jesus was hungry. But those who have fasted for a long period of time claim that after the first few days they no longer feel hungry. Jesus was so absorbed in spiritual devotion that He was evidently not conscious of hunger. But when the long period ended, the gnawing pangs struck Him with probably overwhelming force. The devil, always a cruel foe, took advantage of this situation.

The tempter said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, tell those stones to become bread" (v. 3). Ordinarily there would have been nothing wrong in doing this, and the One who fed the 5,000 with five biscuits and two small fish could easily have done it. But we are to obey God, not Satan.

The devil was tempting Jesus to live wholly on the material level. But Christ answered, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. The Spirit is more important than the body.

### B. The Second Temptation: vv. 5-7

This time the devil transported Jesus to Jerusalem "and had him stand on the highest point of the temple" (v. 5)—150 feet above the paved courtyard. There he challenged Him: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down" (v. 6). Then the devil tried quoting Scripture himself! But typically he misquoted Psalm 91:11-12 by leaving out an



important line: "to guard you in all your ways." When our ways are God's ways, He *will* protect us.

Again Jesus answered with a quotation from Deuteronomy (6:16): "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." When we do foolish, risky things deliberately, we are not honoring God. This is fanaticism.

### C. The Third Temptation: vv. 8-11

This time the devil "took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor" (v. 8). Obviously this move—and probably the previous one—had to be in spirit, not in body, for there is no mountain on earth from which one can see all kingdoms.

The devil promised to give Jesus all of these if He would fall down and worship him (v. 9). Why should Jesus suffer and die, if He could get the rule of the world so easily? But Jesus sought a spiritual kingdom, not a political one.

For the third time (v. 10) Jesus answered with a verse from Deuteronomy (6:13). We are to worship and serve only the Lord God. "Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him" (v. 11).

What is the supreme lesson we can learn from Jesus' temptations? It is this: We have the same weapon to use in defeating Satan that He used effectively. It is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Let's use it always. That means we must memorize it. (See the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 26-27, for ten lessons that may be learned from the temptation of Jesus.)

## III. THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY:

Matthew 4:12-17

### A. A New Location: vv. 12-13

Verse 12 tells us clearly when Jesus began His public ministry: "John had been put in prison." Luke (3:19-20)

gives the reason for Herod's imprisonment of John the Baptist.

When Jesus heard of this He returned from the south to Galilee. After a brief visit at Nazareth, "he went and lived in Capernaum" (v. 13). Nazareth was a small village, and Jesus wanted to be where the people were, to minister to them. So He went to the busy city of Capernaum, on the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee, near its northwest corner.

### B. Fulfillment of Prophecy: vv. 14-16

Capernaum was "in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali" (v. 13). As usual, Matthew quotes an Old Testament prophecy (Isa. 9:1-2) to make this more graphic. The area is called "Galilee of the Gentiles" (v. 15) because it had a large Gentile population after the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel (II Kings 15:29). So its inhabitants are described as "the people living in darkness" (v. 16). Now the "great light," Jesus, had come.

### C. Main Message: v. 17

Jesus began to "preach"—"herald," the same verb used of John the Baptist (3:1). He took John's place as the herald of God.

He also took the same text: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (cf. 3:2). "The keynote of all pioneer preachers is *repent*. Unfortunately, most people have superficial ideas as to what repentance is. They think it means being sorry. But that is not repentance. Someone has said that it means being sorry enough to quit. That comes a little nearer the truth, but is still inadequate. The Bible declares that 'godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation' (II Cor. 7:10). Obviously, then, sorrow is not repentance; it is what produces repentance. The Greek word for repent means 'change' one's mind. Repentance is a change of attitude. It is not an emotional feeling but a moral purpose. It is a determined decision that one is

done with sin, that he has renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil" (*WBC*, IV, 20). True repentance is necessary for salvation.

#### IV. THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES:

Matthew 4:18-22

##### A. Peter and Andrew: vv. 18-20

Jesus was walking along the shore of "the Sea of Galilee" (v. 18). This was only about twelve miles long (north to south) and six miles wide—what we would call a lake. But to those who sailed its surface and fished its waters it was "the sea." As we noted in our lesson on Revelation 21-22, the Jews did not like the Mediterranean Sea, their western boundary.

The Master saw two men, brothers. One was "Simon called Peter." Simon was the most common name for a Jewish man in the first century—according to scholars. Jesus had already given this man the Greek name "Peter" (John 1:42), "a stone," or "rock." Andrew was less prominent. His finest deed was bringing his brother to Jesus (John 1:41).

These two men were "casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen." South of Capernaum there are warm springs where the fish are plentiful.

Jesus said to the two brothers: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (v. 19). "At once [without hesitation] they left their nets and followed him" (v. 20). Prompt obedience brings fruitful results.

##### B. James and John: vv. 21-22

On the shores of the same lake Jesus "saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets" (v. 21). This probably included not only "mending" but washing. Arndt and Gingrich says that here the Greek verb means "put in order," and this "by cleaning, mending, folding together" (W. F.

Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 418).

When Jesus called these two men, "immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him" (v. 22). As with Peter and Andrew, there was prompt and complete obedience.

"These four fishermen were not only the first, but also the foremost of the disciples. Three of them became the inner trio—Peter, James, and John. Peter and John are associated prominently in the early part of Acts (e.g., 3:1; 8:14). Peter was the main spokesman of the apostles both in the Gospels and in the opening chapters of Acts. He it was who preached the great sermon on the day of Pentecost. James must have been a zealous worker, for he was the first of the apostles to become a martyr (Acts 12:2). Andrew played an important role at the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:8-9), though he later fades out of the foreground" (*WBC*, IV, 29).

#### V. THE EXPANDING MINISTRY:

Matthew 4:23-25

##### A. A Threefold Ministry: v. 23

Jesus was an itinerant evangelist. He went all over Galilee (the northern part of Palestine), teaching, preaching, and healing. Fortunately, the

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Jesus' baptism say to us?
2. What is the proper place of fasting?
3. Why do we need to memorize Scripture?
4. Why did Jesus choose Capernaum?
5. Why did Jesus call four fishermen?
6. What place should healing have in the church?

synagogues were open to Him so that He could teach the crowds in the different towns as they gathered for sabbath worship. Thus He was reaching most of the masses who attended the synagogues.

But He was also "preaching the good news of the kingdom." This would probably be mostly outside the synagogue, as crowds gathered to hear Him.

He also was "healing every disease and sickness among the people." Medical science was almost nonexistent among the Jews of that day. Rabbinical prescriptions for various illnesses, as preserved to us in writing, sound almost like those of the pagan witch doctors today. So Jesus' healing ministry was very much needed and appreciated.

### B. Healing the Sick: v. 24

With no good doctors around, Jesus was very popular. "News about him spread all over Syria"—which would take in Palestine and areas to the north and east.

"People brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the

epileptics and the paralytics, and he healed them." It is difficult for us to realize today how important this ministry was at that time. It demonstrated both the compassion and the deity of Jesus. Only He who was Love Incarnate could have such compassion, and only the divine Son of God could heal every illness as He did.

### C. Large Crowds from Everywhere: v. 25

We read that Jesus was followed by large crowds "from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan." Galilee, as we have noted, comprised the northern part of Palestine. *Decapolis* is a Greek word meaning "Ten Cities." The Roman government gave special status to ten cities stretching from Philadelphia (modern Amman) in the south to Damascus in the north. The area was known as "The Decapolis."

Jerusalem was in the southern part of Palestine, called Judea. Transjordan ("across the Jordan") would take in what we know today as the Jordan Kingdom, east of the Jordan River. People from all these flocked to Jesus.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Martin Luther was once asked, "What is the most important preparation for the ministry?" He answered, "Temptation." The questioner then inquired, "What is the second most important?" Again the reply: "Temptation." Undaunted, the person asked, "What is the third?" Once more Luther replied, "Temptation."

This may seem to be somewhat of an oversimplification. But there is a great deal of truth in it. Until metal has been

tested in the furnace, it is of little use or value. Pig iron is bought by the ton. But after the iron has been in the blast furnace for hours and has become tempered steel, the story is different. Watch springs are worth dollars per ounce!

God cannot use us in His service until we have been tested in the fires of affliction. We must let Him prepare us adequately.

January 4, 1981

## LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Colossians 3:5-17

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Let Your Light Shine*

**Youth Topic:** *Set a Good Example*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 5

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 5:1-16

**Memory Verse:** *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* Matthew 5:16

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Setting Good Examples*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 5

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 5:1-16

**Memory Verse:** *Do not imitate evil, but imitate good.* III John 11

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

Dec. 29 M.: God's Word Gives Light. Ps. 119:129-136

Dec. 30 T.: Called from Darkness to Light. Eph. 5:3-14

Dec. 31 W.: Christians—Light in the World. Phil. 2:12-18

Jan. 1 T.: Living in Light Brings Freedom. John 3:16-21

Jan. 2 F.: Walk in the Light. I John 1:5-10

Jan. 3 S.: Love—Evidence of Walking in Light. I John 2:7-11

Jan. 4 S.: A Shining Light to Others. Col. 3:5-17

LESSON AIM

To challenge us to live the Christian life as disciples of Christ.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about A. D. 28

**Place:** hillside overlooking the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee.

LESSON OUTLINE

**Let Your Light Shine**

**I. The Setting of the Sermon:** Matthew 5:1-2

**II. The Beatitudes:** Matthew 5:3-12

A. The Poor in Spirit: v. 3

B. Those Who Mourn: v. 4

C. The Meek: v. 5

D. Those Who Thirst for Righteousness: v. 6



- E. The Merciful: v. 7
- F. The Pure in Heart: v. 8
- G. The Peacemakers: v. 9
- H. The Persecuted: v. 10
- I. Further Amplification: vv. 11-12

### III. Two Symbols of the Christian: Matthew 5:13-16

- A. The Salt of the Earth: v. 13
- B. The Light of the World: v. 14
- C. Purpose of Light: v. 15
- D. Let Your Light Shine: v. 16

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

Unit I of our study of Matthew's Gospel consisted of four lessons covering the first four chapters. The title of that unit was "Preparation for Ministry." We noted especially John the Baptist's preparation for Jesus, and then Jesus' own preparation.

Today we begin our study of Unit II, "The Meaning of Discipleship" (Matt. 5-12). The first three chapters (5, 6, 7) give us what is commonly known as "The Sermon on the Mount." Here Jesus spells out for us the great principles that should guide us in living as His disciples.

Christianity is basically not a religion of dos and don'ts. Rather it is letting Christ come into our hearts and then letting Him live out His life through us.

To give us some guidelines for practical Christian living, Jesus gave us the Sermon on the Mount. If we put its principles into practice, we will find the secret of a happy, holy life.

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

Our lesson topic today is "Set a Good Example." That is one way of saying, "Let Your Light Shine," the general title of today's lesson, quoting the very words of Jesus in Matthew 5:16.

Every day our lives are setting some kind of an example to others. But is it always a good example? That is a question that should make us pause and think. We cannot escape our influence any more than we can run away from our shadow when we are out in the bright sunshine. We cannot choose whether or not we are going to set an example. The only choice we have is what kind of example we are going to set.

That puts a heavy responsibility on every one of us. We need to ask the Lord to help us set a good example every day.

#### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. Our lives should set a good example for others.
2. We should profit by the lives of others who set a good example for us to follow.
3. Setting a good example means being kind and Christ-like.
4. We should not take the attitude that we are better than others.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE SETTING OF THE SERMON:

Matthew 5:1-2

At the close of our last lesson we read that large crowds from surrounding geographical areas followed Jesus (4:25). They were primarily interested in physical needs (see 4:24), but Jesus wanted to talk to His disciples about spiritual things.

So He "went up on a mountainside." The reason for this translation (NIV) is that in this immediate area there is no real "mountain," but only long, sloping hills. This is based on the assumption, which seems likely, that Jesus was staying near the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Here, on the mountainside, Jesus "sat down." The Greek and Roman speakers stood, as we do today. But the custom of the Jewish rabbis was always to sit while teaching. Jesus conformed to this custom.

"His disciples came to him." The Greek word for "disciple" means "learner." What an appropriate designation for these who sat at Jesus' feet and learned of Him! If we profess to be Christ's disciples, we should show it by being real learners every day. And we have so much to learn!

The Master had just called His first four disciples (4:18-22). Now He is showing them what true discipleship means. He is describing the kind of life His disciples are to live.

One of the best books on the Sermon on the Mount is *The Christ of the Mount*, by E. Stanley Jones. He writes, "The greatest need of modern Christianity is the rediscovery of the Sermon on the Mount as the only practical way to live" (p. 14). He also admonishes us, "We must now cease to embalm it. We must embody it" (p. 17). Christ was the only full embodiment. But we must follow Him by seeking to embody it more and more.

Jesus begins with the inner life. Jones aptly observes that Christ "in-

sisted that men could not live at the circumference unless they were alive at the center. The modern attempt is to have *quantity* of life at the circumference regardless of *quality* of life at the center" (p. 52). That shows up in the search for more material goods and more extravaganza of pleasure. But neither of these will satisfy.

### II. THE BEATITUDES:

Matthew 5:3-12

#### A. The Poor in Spirit: v. 3

The Sermon on the Mount has been called "The Constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven." If we adopt that figure, we would say that the Beatitudes are the preamble to the constitution.

Another way of looking at the Beatitudes is to think of them as indicating steps *into* and *in* the Christian life. We shall follow that approach.

The first step is that we become "poor in spirit"—that is, that we recognize our spiritual poverty. In and of ourselves we have nothing good to offer God. In a very real sense we can get no help from God spiritually unless and until we file bankruptcy papers in the bank of heaven, for all of us are "dead broke" spiritually until we receive His grace in our hearts.

Adam Clarke puts it well. He says that "poor in spirit" indicates "one who is deeply conscious of his spiritual poverty and wretchedness. In the original this means someone who trembles or shrinks with fear. Being destitute of the true riches, he is tremblingly alive to the necessities of his soul, shrinking with fear lest he should perish without the salvation of God. Such Christ pronounces happy, because there is but a step between them and that Kingdom which is here promised" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 773).

Not the powerful, but the poor in spirit, are "blessed." The Greek word is

*makarios*. Friedrich Hauck writes, "*Makarios* describes first the happy state of the gods above earthly sufferings and labours" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, 362). As used in the New Testament, it and cognate terms refer "overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God" (p. 367). Speaking of the Beatitudes, Hauck says, "The power of the statements lies in their reversal of all human values" (p. 368).

Some would use the word *happy* here in place of *blessed*. John Wesley did that over two hundred years ago (1755) in his English translation of the Greek New Testament. The above quotation from Adam Clarke shows that he took it that way, and many more recent versions and commentaries have adopted "happy."

But the classical usage of *makarios* indicates that it referred primarily to divine blessedness. Today the word "happy" is related too often to the happenstances of life. But the true Christian is still "blessed" when everything seems to go wrong. I agree with the conclusion of W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich: "The translation *O, the happiness of or hail to those*, favored by some... may be exactly right for the Aramaic original... but it scarcely exhausts the content which *makarios* had in the mouths of Greek-speaking Christians" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 487).

Each beatitude begins with the word *Blessed*. R. C. H. Lenski makes this beautiful comment: "'Blessed!' intoned again and again, sounds like bells of heaven, ringing down into this unblest world from the cathedral spires of the Kingdom, inviting all men to enter" (*The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*).

Matthew Henry says of this Beatitude: "This poverty of spirit is put first among the Christian graces. The philosophers did not reckon humility among their moral virtues, but Christ puts it first. Self-denial is the first les-

son to be learned in his school, and poverty of spirit entitled to the first beatitude. The foundation of all other graces is laid in humility. Those who would build high must begin low, and it is an excellent preparative for the entrance of gospel-grace into the soul; it fits the soil to receive the seed" (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, V, 49).

To those who recognize and acknowledge their spiritual poverty, the promise is given: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Some commentators make this entirely future, but the present tense in the Greek favors an application to this life.

John Monro Gibson has this helpful comment: "In expounding the blessedness of the kingdom the Master has unfolded the character of its members, thus not only explaining the nature of the kingdom and the advantages to be enjoyed under it, but also showing who those are that belong to it. That this was intended seems evident from the first and last beatitudes, both ending with the emphatic words 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' It is as if on the two gates at the hither and farther end of this beautiful garden were inscribed the words, 'The truly blessed ones, the citizens of the commonwealth of heaven, are those who are at home here'" (*The Expositor's Bible*, IV, 711).

The kingdom of heaven is open to those who will confess their spiritual poverty, depend entirely on the grace of God, and remain humble in spirit. The kingdom is both present and eternal.

#### B. Those Who Mourn: v. 4

Not the merrymakers, but those that mourn, will find true happiness. Most people want happiness, but are seeking it the wrong way and so don't find it.

When we realize our utterly undone condition before God, the fact that in ourselves we have no spiritual assets to present to Him, it will cause us to mourn. We will cry out as Isaiah did: "Woe to me! I am ruined!" (Isa. 6:5).

But those who mourn over their lost



condition will be "comforted." The Greek verb suggests the idea of someone coming alongside to help. And our English word comes from the Latin, *con*, "with" and *fortis*, "strength"—that is, "strengthened by being with." That is exactly what God's presence or the presence of someone who really loves us does.

### C. The Meek: v. 5

"Not the mighty, but the meek, will inherit the earth (cf. Psa. 37:11). Not the greedy, but the godly, will gain the inheritance. Paul gives vivid expression to this paradox in II Corinthians 6:6-10" (*Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 31).

What is true meekness? It is not a matter of striking a pious pose, of trying to appear humble. Rather, meekness is submission to the will of God. It is a willingness to accept whatever He gives us.

The meek will "inherit the earth." E. Stanley Jones gives this testimony: "When I walked out into world the morning after I made my self-surrender I thought I had never before seen the world; the trees clapped their hands and all nature was atingle with joy and beauty. For the first time I knew that the earth was mine. I had inherited it" (p. 70).

### D. Those Who Thirst for Righteousness: v. 6

One of the early signs of life in a normal baby is hunger. So the one who has truly been born again will "hunger and thirst for righteousness." A good spiritual appetite is a sign of spiritual health.

And again there is a promise: "For they will be filled." The Greek verb is *chortazo*, from *chortos*, "grass." The picture is that of cattle eating all the grass they want until they are full. Then they lie down satisfied, a picture of perfect contentment. In fact, the verb can very well be translated as "satisfied" (NASB).

### E. The Merciful: v. 7

Since God has been so merciful to us in forgiving all our many sins, we should be merciful and forgiving toward others. If we are merciful, we "will be shown mercy." If not, we open ourselves to severe judgment.

The most vivid illustration of how unreasonable it is to refuse to forgive others is presented in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35). A servant who owed his king ten million dollars was called in and payment demanded. When he pleaded for mercy, the king canceled the entire debt. But the forgiven man went out and encountered a fellow servant who owed him twenty dollars. Grabbing him by the neck, he demanded immediate payment, and gave no heed to the victim's plea for mercy. The result was that the first servant was called back in by the king and punished. That is what will happen to us if we are not merciful.

### F. The Pure in Heart: v. 8

What does it mean to be pure in heart? The great Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard expressed it exactly when he said, "Purity of heart is to will one intention." It means a full submission of our will to God's will, so that we desire just one thing—to please Him.

The pure in heart "will see God." Often this has been interpreted as applying to the next life. But it also has a present application. Sin is like dust in the eyes; it obscures our spiritual vision so that we do not see God and His will clearly. When our hearts are cleansed from sin we get 20-20 vision spiritually.

### G. The Peacemakers: v. 9

Not the pugnacious, but the peacemakers, "will be called sons of God." The Greek does not say "the children of God" (KJV). When the definite article is omitted in the Greek it emphasizes kind or character. People who make peace will be called "God's sons" because they act like God. In Jewish



thinking, "son of" meant "having the nature of." That is the point here.

"Those who seek to avert quarrels, to harmonize differences, to strengthen friendship, to avoid petty bickering, to create a pleasant atmosphere, to work for a sympathetic understanding between loved ones, friends, neighbors, social classes, industrial groups, and nations—these display the divine nature of love and so will be *called sons of God* by those who observe them. One of the most important places to be a peacemaker is in the home" (*WBC*, IV, 31).

### H. The Persecuted: v. 10

Not the persecutors, but the persecuted, will inherit the kingdom. One of the great tragedies of history is that often persecutors of Christians have claimed to be doing God's will.

But there is an important modifier here. It is "those who are persecuted because of righteousness" that will enjoy the kingdom. Some self-made martyrs have complained of being "persecuted for righteousness' sake," when they were really suffering because of their own foolishness. We should avoid trying to wear a martyr's crown to evoke sympathy.

### I. Further Amplification: vv. 11-12

Verse 11 begins with "Blessed," but it seems that these two verses are not a new Beatitude, but an enlargement on the eighth one (v. 10).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What produces true humility?
2. How is true humility shown?
3. How does God comfort those who mourn?
4. How can we show our meekness?
5. How can we be peacemakers in our homes?
6. How can we let our light shine?

Jesus said that when we are insulted and slandered, we should "rejoice and be glad." That is what Christ did when He was persecuted. Someone has well said, "The Beatitudes are an autobiography of Christ."

Why rejoice? "Because great is your reward in heaven" (v. 12). But we can also say that the kingdom of God is not only a pleasant prospect but a present possession. To know Christ is to enjoy the kingdom now.

## III. TWO SYMBOLS OF THE CHRISTIAN: Matthew 5:13-16

### A. The Salt of the Earth: v. 13

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth." Salt has two main uses. The first is for seasoning. What would oatmeal or gravy be without salt?

In the Middle Ages in Europe, when people raised most of their own food, they still had to travel to annual markets to get salt. It was considered an absolutely essential ingredient. Just so, life without Christ is unbearably insipid. And as Christ has toned up life for the believer, so we in turn should tone up life for those around us.

The second use is for preserving. When fish were caught in the Lake of Galilee and taken a hundred miles to the market in Jerusalem, it was not in refrigerator cars but on the backs of donkeys in the hot sun. How were the fish preserved? By salting them down.

Just so, Christians are to be the preservative of modern society. When we think of the moral rotteness in the world today *with* the church, we shudder to think of what it would be *without* it.

Salt that loses its saltiness is worthless, Jesus said. One of our great responsibilities is to guard carefully against losing the salt of our vital Christian experience.

### B. The Light of the World: v. 14

"You are the light of the world." What a challenging statement! Jesus

said, "I am the light of the world!" (John 8:12; 9:5). We believe that and rejoice in the fact.

But how can we be "the light of the world"? By letting Jesus, the Light of the world, flood our hearts and shine out through our lives.

Another figure is significant. The moon has no light of its own, but simply reflects the sun on the darkened side of the earth, where people can't see the sun. So we should reflect the light of Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, on the lives of those who sit in the darkness of their sin.

Jesus went on to say, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden." As one travels through Palestine today, one frequently sees a city set on a hill.

There is a solemn lesson for us here: Whether we like it or not, we Christians are always on display before the world. This means that we have to be careful with our attitudes and actions all the time. We are never "off duty."

### C. Purpose of Light: v. 15

The King James Version uses "candle" and "candlestick." But people had no such things in Jesus' day. The Greek very clearly says "lamp" and

"lampstand." Many lamps from the first century have been dug up by archaeologists. They are small clay lamps, holding perhaps half a cup of olive oil, and small enough to nestle in the palm of one's hand.

People would not light a lamp and put it under "a bushel" (KJV). The Greek word is *modion*, "a peck measure" (NASB), or "bowl" (NIV). Probably Jesus referred to "a meal tub" (NEB). The reason for lighting a lamp is to "give light." Interestingly, the Greek has *lampei*, from which we get our word *lamp*.

### D. Let Your Light Shine: v. 16

Then Jesus made the application: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Actually, it is more important to praise the Lord with our lives than with our lips. We should do both!

There is so much moral and spiritual darkness all around us today. Are we letting our light shine out in the night as we should? Salt is hidden, unseen. But light is open, widely seen. We are to have both kinds of influence on the society in which we live.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

A quaint old Puritan divine is quoted as making this statement: "Jesus said, 'Let your light shine before men,' but He did not say, 'Smash your lamp in your neighbor's face.'"

This is a helpful hint in the matter of witnessing for Christ. There are two extremes, both of them unsatisfactory. One is to be so quiet about it that no one ever hears about the Savior from us. The other is to be so aggressive that we turn people off.

Probably most have heard the old gag about the barber who had been saved and who was told to witness to someone every day. It was nearly five o'clock one afternoon. As he was sharpening his razor on the strap, he suddenly remembered that he had not witnessed that day. Holding his sharp razor over the head of the customer in the chair, he asked, "Brother, are you ready to die?" We need to use good judgment, but we need to witness.

January 11, 1981

## BUILD ON THE SOLID ROCK

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Ephesians 3:1-12

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Build on the Solid Rock*

**Youth Topic:** *Build a Good Life*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 6-7

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 7:13-29

**Memory Verse:** *You will know them by their fruits.*  
Matthew 7:20

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Building Good Lives*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 6-7

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 7:21-27

**Memory Verse:** *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* John 14:15

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Jan. 5 M.:** Formula for Faith and Forgiveness. Matt. 6:1-15

**Jan. 6 T.:** Treasures of the Heart in Heaven. Matt. 6:16-24

**Jan. 7 W.:** Putting First Things First. Matt. 6:25-34

**Jan. 8 T.:** Spiritual Nearsightedness. Matt. 7:1-6

**Jan. 9 F.:** Giving Good Things. Matt. 7:7-12

**Jan. 10 S.:** Way, Narrow, Hard. Matt. 7:13-23

**Jan. 11 S.:** Hearing and Doing. Matt. 7:24-29

LESSON AIM

To help us see the importance of building our lives on the solid Rock, Christ Jesus.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about A.D. 28

**Place:** near the northwest shore of the Lake of Galilee

LESSON OUTLINE

### Build on the Solid Rock

#### I. Sincerity of Motive: Matthew 6:1-18

A. Introduction: v. 1

B. Giving: vv. 2-4

C. Praying: vv. 5-15

D. Fasting: vv. 16-18

#### II. Singleness of Purpose: Matthew 6:19-24

A. Single Treasure: vv. 19-21

B. Single Eye: vv. 22-23

C. Single Master: v. 24

**III. Simplicity of Trust: Matthew 6:25-34****IV. Warning Against Judging Others: Matthew 7:1-6****V. Persistence in Prayer: Matthew 7:7-12****VI. The Two Ways: Matthew 7:13-14**

A. The Broad Way: v. 13

B. The Narrow Way: v. 14

**VII. A Tree and Its Fruit: Matthew 7:15-20**

A. False Prophets: vv. 15-16

B. Good and Bad Fruit: vv. 17-18

C. Fate of the Bad Tree: vv. 19-20

**VIII. Doing, Not Just Saying: Matthew 7:21-23****IX. Wise and Foolish Builders: Matthew 7:24-27**

A. The House on the Rock: vv. 24-25

B. The House on the Sand: vv. 26-27

**X. Jesus as Teacher: Matthew 7:28-29**

Last week we studied Matthew 5:1-16. We had already studied Matthew 5:17-20 in our first lesson of this quarter. Chapter 5:21-48 gives us six illustrations of the principle enunciated in verse 20 (the key verse of the Sermon on the Mount), as we noted at that point.

The complete lesson for today covers the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (cc. 6-7). Since we cannot possibly cover all this material in detail, we are giving a rapid survey of Matthew 6:1-7:12. Then we concentrate our attention on the Scripture lesson, Matthew 7:13-29.

Like most good sermons, this great one by Jesus ends with an illustration. Graphically the Master portrayed two kinds of builders. It is a constant warning to us, for all of us are building every day. We need to be sure that we are building solidly on the Rock, Christ Jesus. Only what is built on Him will stand the storms of life. And the storms will come—for all of us. But if we build right, we will be ready for them.

Our lesson today warns us against being duped by false prophets, and never was this warning more needed.

We have recently had the unbelievable example of the Reverend James Jones, who led nearly one thousand deceived followers to commit mass suicide. Not so drastic, but ultimately just as tragic, is the case of the devotees of other false prophets of our day, who lead people astray by their manmade notions.

The last part of the lesson deals with the topic, "Build a Good Life." If we are going to have the good life—not as the world uses that phrase, but in the true, biblical sense—we

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH



CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

will have to build on the Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ. And Jesus indicated that that means not simply saying we are Christians but obeying God's Word.

1. It is not enough to call Jesus our "Lord."
2. We must obey Him as Lord of our lives.
3. Our praying should be simple and sincere.
4. Building good lives means letting Jesus have His way each day we live.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. SINCERITY OF MOTIVE:

Matthew 6:1-18

#### A. Introduction: v. 1

"Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness [so the best Greek text, not "your alms" (KJV)] before men, to be seen by them." In other words, "Don't parade your piety." This verse is an introduction to three acts of righteousness: giving, praying, and fasting.

#### B. Giving: vv. 2-4

Jesus warned against making a show of our giving. Our motive should not be to receive the praise of men, but to give sincerely out of love for God and for others.

#### C. Praying: vv. 5-15

Our motive in prayer must likewise be sincere—to worship God from our hearts. Jesus gave a beautiful example for us in the Lord's Prayer (vv. 9-13). It is brief, simple, sincere, and unselfish. The needs of God's kingdom come first, not our own wants, but there is a place—the second place—for prayer for our daily bread.

#### D. Fasting: vv. 16-18

Our fasting must also be done with a sincere motive—to please God, not make an impression on our fellow men. We are not to be hypocrites (actors) in our religious life.

### II. SINGLENESS OF PURPOSE:

Matthew 6:19-24

#### A. Single Treasure: vv. 19-21

We are not to store up treasures *for ourselves* on earth. Rather, we are to store up treasures in heaven, where we will reap eternally from our investment in spiritual things in the work of the kingdom.

#### B. Single Eye: vv. 22-23

Again Jesus is emphasizing single-ness of purpose. He says that if our eye is "single" (KJV)—Greek *haplous*, "simple, single"—our whole body will be full of light. Confusion of purpose brings darkness.

#### C. Single Master: v. 24

Jesus warned against trying to serve two masters at once—God and money. He said it cannot be done.

### III. SIMPLICITY OF TRUST:

Matthew 6:25-34

"Take no thought" (KJV) in verses 25 and 34 is very misleading. The Greek says, "Do not be anxious" or "do not worry" (NIV). If we take no thought for the future, life will go to pieces and the work of God will perish.

What Jesus is saying is that we are not to worry about food or clothing. Rather, we are to seek first His king-

dom and righteousness, and all necessary things will be ours (v. 33).

#### IV. WARNING AGAINST JUDGING OTHERS:

Matthew 7:1-6

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (v. 1). That is, don’t be censorious. God alone knows the motives of men, and so He alone is capable of judging people fairly. We should not try to usurp His divine prerogatives.

“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (v. 2). You get what you give!

Then Jesus showed the absurdity of judging others. We see some little fault in a fellow Christian, and try to straighten him out. In doing it we show a bad spirit, which is like a “plank” in our eye, while his fault is just a “speck of sawdust” in comparison. The principle here is simply this: You can’t help people unless you love them!

The true meaning of verse 6 is: Don’t give the sacred things of your life to the dogs of desire or throw the pearl of personality to the hogs of appetite. Keep as sacred and holy what God has given to you.

#### V. PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER:

Matthew 7:7-12

Ask, seek, knock—these represent three degrees of prayer. “Seek” suggests earnest praying. “Knock” suggests desperate praying. We are to trust God to give what is best.

Verse 12 is called the Golden Rule. Jesus was the first to state this in positive form.

#### VI. THE TWO WAYS:

Matthew 7:13-14

The longest book of the Bible, and situated right at the middle of our Bibles, is the Book of Psalms. It begins with the psalm of the Two Ways (Psalm 1). Here we find a vivid description of “the way of the righteous” and “the way of the wicked.”

The theme of the two ways is also prominent in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, particularly in the Book of Proverbs. An outstanding example is found in Proverbs 2:1-15. Here we have the contrast between “straight paths” and “dark ways” (v. 13).

Another graphic passage is Proverbs 14:1-14. The very first verse has a striking connection with our lesson today:

The wise woman builds her house,  
but with her own hands the foolish  
one tears hers down.

Throughout much of Proverbs we find what we see here—antithetic parallelism. The contrast between the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked, is the dominant feature of the whole book. And that is what we find in our present lesson.

#### A. The Broad Way: v. 13

Jesus exhorted His hearers to “enter through the narrow gate.” Then He told them, “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.”

Bible readers are familiar with the concept of the narrow road to eternal life and the broad road to eternal destruction. They form a mental picture of a narrow way leading upward and a wider way leading downward.

But there is an added dimension that needs to be recognized. The Greek word for “broad” is *ewrychoros*, which means “spacious” or “wide open.” It takes in all the territory outside the narrow way. The true concept is that if we are not walking the narrow road of God’s will for us each day, then we are on the wide open road of having our own way, and that way leads to destruction.

“Broadway Christianity” is a constant threat. People think that because outwardly they live good moral lives they are on their way to heaven. Not so! If they have not confessed their sins,

found forgiveness, and taken Christ's way, they are on the wrong road.

### B. The Narrow Way: v. 14

We found that the word for "broad" is significant. The same is true of the word for "narrow" in this verse. The Greek has *tethlimmene*, which is the perfect passive participle of *thlibo*. In the active this verb means "press together, compress, make narrow," and in the passive "became restricted, narrow." W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich say that the form here indicates "a narrow, confined road" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 362).

This is in the greatest possible contrast to the "wide open road" that leads to destruction. The road that leads to life is a restricted one, "and only a few find it." It is entered by repentance and faith—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our only Savior from sin. It is restricted to those who will obediently follow the will of God. If we want to have our own way, if we want to do as we please, we will find ourselves on the wide open road to destruction, along with the "many."

## VII. A TREE AND ITS FRUIT:

Matthew 7:15-20

### A. False Prophets: vv. 15-16

Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets" (v. 15). Adam Clarke writes, "By false prophets we are to understand teachers of erroneous doctrines, who come professing a commission from God, but whose aim is not to bring the heavenly treasure to the people, but rather to rob them of their earthly good" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 781).

Jesus described them this way: "They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." They appear to be pious, but actually they are greedy for money. There are too many of these false prophets today.

How can we know what they are?

Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (v. 16). At first glance this might seem to conflict with the first verse of this chapter: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." But there Jesus was warning against a harsh, critical spirit. Here He is simply stating the principle that one inevitably recognizes people's true characters by the "fruit" of their outward lives. If we see a person openly breaking the laws of God, we are not judging him when we say that he is not a Christian; the fact is obvious.

Then Jesus gave a concrete illustration: "Do people pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?" The Greek indicates definitely that a negative answer is expected.

The converse of this ought to make us stop and think. Do we have prickly personalities? Do people get stabbed with sharp thorns when they talk with us? If so, are they going to believe that we are Christians?

### B. Good and Bad Fruit: vv. 17-18

Jesus laid the matter right on the line. He made the general application: "Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit" (v. 17). Then, to make the impact doubly strong, He added the negative form: "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (v. 18).

In both verses the Greek word for "bad" before "tree" means "decayed" or "rotten" (cf. NASB). If our hearts are rotten or decayed by sin, we will not bear good fruit in our lives.

### C. Fate of the Bad Tree: vv. 19-20

"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (v. 19). This is a very solemn warning that every professing Christian should heed.

Matthew Henry writes of those described here: "God will deal with them as men use to deal with dry trees that cumber the ground: he will mark them by some signal tokens of his displeasure... will cut them down by death,



and cast them into the fire of hell, a fire blown with the bellows of God's wrath, and fed with the wood of barren trees" (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, V, 95).

Verse 20 reiterates the truth stated in verse 16. The repetition shows the importance of the emphasis Jesus is making here. We need to be sure that our hearts are pure and good, so that we will bear good fruit in our daily lives. Otherwise, we are doomed to destruction.

### VIII. DOING, NOT JUST SAYING: Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (v. 21). It is not a matter of saying, but of doing.

"Not profession but possession is what makes one a true disciple of Christ. It is not calling Him *Lord*, but doing the *will* of the Father. That is the one requirement for membership in the *kingdom of heaven*. For the kingdom is the reign or rule of God. It is not an outward organization but a living organism. It is composed of those who have submitted their hearts to the will of God and who seek to work out the divine will in their daily lives" (Ralph Earle, *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 41).

It is more than lip service that Jesus demands; it is a life dedicated to doing the will of God. And people can see in our daily lives whether or not we are meeting this test, are bearing good fruit.

Jesus continued with His warning: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'" Probably "that day" means the final judgment day. It should be noted that "demons," not "devils" (KJV), is correct. The New Testament teaches very clearly that there is only one "devil" (Greek, *diabolos*) but that there are many "demons" (Greek, *daimonia*).

The distinction should always be maintained.

"Prophecy" in the New Testament means "preach." So Jesus is talking here about preachers who preach in His name, drive out demons, and even perform many miracles. And yet to many of them He will say at the judgment, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (v. 23).

How could we have a sharper warning? We need to search our hearts, both preachers and lay people, and make sure that we are doing God's will daily.

### IX. WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS: Matthew 7:24-27

#### A. The House on the Rock: vv. 24-25

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine [the Sermon on the Mount particularly at this time] and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (v. 24). The King James Version says "a rock," but the Greek says "the rock"—the solid ledge of rock that will stand firm regardless of what happens around it.

Adam Clarke comments: "True wisdom consists in getting the building of our salvation completed. To this end we must build on the Rock, Christ Jesus, and make the building firm by

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by "the narrow way"?
2. Why is the gate so narrow?
3. Why do the masses take the wide open way?
4. What kind of fruit should we bear in our lives?
5. Do we have false prophets today?
6. How do we build solid lives?



keeping close to the maxims of His gospel, and having our tempers and lives conformed to its word and spirit; and when, in order to this, we lean on nothing but the grace of Christ, we then build upon a solid rock" (*Commentary*, pp. 781-82).

Jesus continued, "The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation in the rock" (v. 25). Adam Clarke writes: "There are three general kinds of trials to which the followers of Christ are exposed, and to which, some think, our Lord alludes here: *First*, those of temporal afflictions, coming in the course of divine providence; these may be likened to the torrents of *rain*. *Second*, those which come from the passions of men, and which may be likened to the impetuous *rivers*. *Third*, those which come from Satan and his angels, and which like tempestuous *whirlwinds*, threaten to carry everything before them. He alone whose soul is built on the Rock of ages stands all these shocks; and not only stands in, but profits by them" (*Commentary*, p. 782).

#### B. The House on the Sand: vv. 26-27

"But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them

into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand" (v. 26). When the rain, rivers, and winds came, "it fell with a great crash" (v. 27). The end of that house was sudden disaster.

#### X. JESUS AS TEACHER: Matthew 7:28-29

"When Jesus had finished saying these things" (v. 28) is basically the formula at the end of each of the five great discourses of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Matthew wrote very methodically.

We are told that "the crowds were amazed at his teaching." Why? "Because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (v. 29). "The people were astonished at Christ's teaching. They were accustomed to hearing the scribes quote other authorities—the rabbis of the past. But Jesus spoke with His own authority. The difference was startling. The crowds recognized that they were not listening to human opinions but to divine truth. Here was something that gripped their hearts and held them" (*WBC*, IV, 42).

We should speak today with the authority of experience, declaring what we know, but especially with the authority of God's Word—our supreme authority.

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### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Many years ago (1938) we were looking for a house in a suburb of Boston, on the south shore. A real estate lady showed us one that was nearly new, very modern, and at a very low price. We were delighted and eager to buy.

But then she took us back into the house and showed us cracked walls we hadn't noticed. She told us that the house was built on filled-in land, once a

part of the ocean. It had been steadily sinking since.

So we bought a house on higher ground, built on a solid granite foundation. There we lived for many years, without any fear of sinking or collapse.

If our lives are going to stand, we must build on the solid Rock, Christ Jesus, and the rock of God's Word, not on the shifting sands of men's opinions.

January 18, 1981

## PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Acts 10:34-43

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Proclaim the Kingdom*

**Youth Topic:** *Speak the Word*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 8-10

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 9:35—10:1, 5-15

**Memory Verse:** *The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.* Matthew 9:37-38

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Telling Others About Jesus*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 8-10

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 9:9-13; 10:1-8

**Memory Verse:** *Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.* Matthew 10:32

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Jan. 12 M.:** Action Based on Belief. Matt. 8:1-13

**Jan. 13 T.:** Following in Faith. Matt. 8:14-27

**Jan. 14 W.:** Time of Torment. Matt. 8:28-34

**Jan. 15 T.:** Glorifying God. Matt. 9:1-13

**Jan. 16 F.:** The Touch of Faith. Matt. 9:18-26

**Jan. 17 S.:** Compassion and Commitment. Matt. 9:27-38

**Jan. 18 S.:** The Call of the Kingdom. Matt. 10:1-15

LESSON AIM

To make us aware of our mission to others.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about A.D. 28

**Place:** Galilee

LESSON OUTLINE

### Proclaim the Kingdom

#### I. The Need for Workers: Matthew 9:35-38

A. Threefold Ministry: v. 35

B. The Helpless Crowd: v. 36

C. The Plentiful Harvest: v. 37

D. Prayer for Workers: v. 38

#### II. The Twelve Apostles: Matthew 10:1-4

A. Their Commission: v. 1

B. Their Names: vv. 2-4

**III. Instructions for Ministry: Matthew 10:5-15**

- A. The Twelve Sent Out: v. 5a
- B. Ministry Only to Israel: vv. 5b-6
- C. The Message: v. 7
- D. A Healing Ministry: v. 8
- E. Taking No Money: v. 9
- F. Taking No Luggage: v. 10
- G. Staying in One Home: v. 11
- H. Greeting the People: vv. 12-13
- I. Sign of Rejection: v. 14
- J. Judgment on Rejectors: v. 15

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

Today's lesson background covers Matthew 8-10, but our Scripture lesson concentrates mostly on chapter 10. I suggest that each teacher read my analysis of chapters 9 and 10, as given in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, volume IV, page 42. For your convenience it is quoted here and in the Introduction for Youth.

"Chapters eight and nine contain no less than ten miracles performed by Jesus. They were 'the credentials of the King.' All were done in answer to human need, showing the compassion of the King. All were done in response to the divine will, showing the power of the King. Nine were miracles of healing. The other was a nature miracle—the stilling of the storm."

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

(Teacher: Please read introduction for adults).

"The grouping of these miracles illustrates one of the main characteristics of Matthew—systematic arrangement. The first group of three—healing a leper and a paralytic, and Peter's mother-in-law—is followed by the demand that the disciples leave all to follow Him (vv. 18-22). The second group—the stilling of the storm, the healing of the two demoniacs and of another paralytic—is followed by the call of Matthew (v. 9). The third group—the healing of the hemorrhaging woman and the dead daughter (treated together), of the two blind men, and of the dumb demoniac—ends with a teaching, preaching, healing tour of Galilee. Thus Jesus displayed His authority over disease, demons, and death.

"The new Moses, like the old, was not only a law-giver (Sermon on the Mount), but also a miracle-worker. The one who declared, 'But I say unto you!' must give adequate evidence of His divine authority. These were Jesus' credentials to a doubting nation" (*Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 42).

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Jesus called Matthew to follow Him even though Matthew was disliked by other Jews.
2. But Matthew was a changed man after his call.
3. The word *disciple* means "learner."
4. We should show by our lives that we are followers of Jesus.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE NEED FOR WORKERS: Matthew 9:35-38

#### A. Threefold Ministry of Jesus: v. 35

This verse is almost identical with 4:23. Jesus' ministry consisted of three activities: teaching, preaching, and healing.

Today our churches are involved in the first two. But how about the third? Should a healing ministry be promoted in the church of Jesus Christ?

Several things could be said on the subject. One is the undeniable fact that medical science was almost nonexistent among the Jews in Jesus' day. Without a miracle of healing, many more people would have died prematurely.

Another fact is that the Jews expected their Messiah to perform miracles. As we noted in the Introduction, the miracles of Jesus were "the credentials of the King," proving that He was the Messiah. But do we need them in this day of good doctors and well-equipped hospitals?

Paul declared: "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified" (I Cor. 1:22-23). The apostle seems to be saying: "I am not pandering to the Jewish demand for miracles, nor the Greek desire for philosophical reason. I simply preach Christ crucified to meet the spiritual needs of people." To this I add that in our scientific age miracles are not necessarily convincing to most people.

But having said all this, we must face the fact that the Epistle of James gives specific directions for divine healing (James 5:14-16). This passage indicates that the church is to carry on a ministry of physical healing. There seems to be no question that the church at large has been remiss at this point.

Today there is a great deal of emphasis on ministering to the whole person—body, soul, and spirit. God is still healing bodies as well as souls. The

important thing is that He, not human individuals, should get the glory. If He is the One who does it, then He should get the credit. So-called "faith healers" have too often paraded their names and personalities. God is the real Healer, not man.

We are told that Jesus was healing every "disease" and "sickness." The Greek word for the first, *nosis*, is the common term for disease in the synoptic Gospels and once in Acts (19:12). The second term here in the Greek is *malakia*, found only in Matthew (here, 4:23 and 10:1). It literally means "weakness," and so "bodily weakness" or "sickness." (This is the reverse of the King James Version). We find the same two words in the same order in 10:1. Incidentally, our English word *therapy* comes from the Greek noun *therapeia*, related to the verb here (*therapeuo*).

#### B. The Helpless Crowd: v. 36

When Jesus saw the crowds, "he had compassion on them." The use of the aorist tense in the Greek suggests: "He was *gripped* with compassion." This was Jesus' immediate reaction to human need. And if our hearts are filled with His love, it should be our reaction, too. Note also that the Greek verb here is a very strong term, suggesting that Jesus' inner being was deeply stirred by what He saw.

Our word *compassion* comes from the Latin *compassio*—literally, "suffer with." This should not be confused with "pity," which is a much weaker term. "Sympathy" comes from a Greek compound that also means "suffer with." We do not really have either compassion or sympathy unless we "empathize" (literally, "suffer in"). These terms should be used only when we in a measure identify ourselves with people in their need, and so enter somewhat into their sufferings.

Jesus had compassion on the people "because they were harassed and helpless." The two Greek verbs could be



translated “were distressed and cast down”—perfect passive participles that suggest a lasting condition of distraction and dejection: literally, “worn out” and “thrown to the ground.”

The people were “like sheep without a shepherd.” They had no one to care for them. But now “the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11) was there. If they would be willing to be His sheep and follow Him, they would enjoy His loving care.

### C. The Plentiful Harvest: v. 37

Having seen the crowds in their deep need, Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” If that was true then, how much more is it true today with our world population of four billion persons, most of whom know nothing about Jesus Christ. What a harvest awaits the reapers!

### D. Prayer for Workers: v. 38

There is only one solution. We must ask the Lord of the harvest “to send out workers into his harvest field.” The verb is a strong one in Greek, literally meaning “cast out.” It suggests divine compulsion in getting workers to go out to the needy fields.

But this is a dangerous prayer to pray unless we are ready to pay the price. Often when people have obediently voiced this prayer, the Lord has whispered back, “I want you to go” or “I want your son or daughter for the mission field.” We cannot conscientiously pray for others to go unless we are willing to go ourselves.

## II. THE TWELVE APOSTLES:

Matthew 10:1-4

### A. Their Commission: v. 1

“He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority”—not “power” (KJV)—“to drive out evil spirits and to cure every kind of disease

and sickness.” The Master thus commissioned His disciples to do the job that needed to be done. In His human body Jesus was limited as to the territory He could cover. Now His healing ministry would be multiplied through the labors of His twelve disciples. This was, in a sense, an answer to the prayer of the previous verse (9:38).

### B. Their Names: vv. 2-4

In verse 2 the “twelve disciples” are called the “twelve apostles.” This is appropriate. “Disciple” literally means “learner.” The twelve men had been following Jesus: hearing His words, watching His work, and learning from Him. Now they were to go out as “apostles,” which literally means “ones sent on a mission.” This mission is described in the previous verse; they were to drive out demons and heal sick people.

In the New Testament we have four lists of the twelve apostles. Three are found in the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16). The other—omitting Judas Iscariot, who was then dead—is in Acts 1:13.

Every list begins with Peter, the leading apostle. Also we find the four fishermen, whom Jesus called first, heading the lists. These were two sets of brothers.

In the list we find two men with the name *Simon* and two called *James*. This reflects the fact that these were very common names among the Jews of that day—*Simon* being the most common Jewish name in the first century, and *James* being *Jacob* in the Greek, after the father of the twelve patriarchs.

Only in this Gospel is Matthew identified as “the tax collector.” This shows the humility of the writer, for tax collectors were despised.

“Simon the Canaanite” (KJV) is actually “Simon the Cananaean.” This is correctly interpreted by Luke as “Simon the Zealot” (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Poor Judas is identified regularly as the one “who betrayed him [Jesus].”

### III. INSTRUCTIONS FOR MINISTRY: Matthew 10:5-15

#### A. The Twelve Sent Out: v. 5a

"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions." In his parallel account, Mark says that "he sent them out two by two" (Mark 6:7). This is the kind of situation where we could truly say that "two are better than one." If one became sick or discouraged or uncertain which way to go, the other could give needed help. This is still good policy.

#### B. Ministry Only to Israel: vv. 5b-6

"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."

All non-Jews were called "Gentiles." The "Samaritans" were "half-breeds," part Jew and part Gentile. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians captured Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and took many Israelites into captivity. But they also brought people from other captured nations and placed them in central Palestine. The result was a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles in the time of Christ. As is usually the case with half-breeds, they were despised by both sides. The Jews considered them "unclean," like the Gentiles.

If Jesus came for the salvation of all mankind, why did He tell His apostles to go only to the lost sheep of Israel? This was a temporary command, just for that particular time. Jesus must first present Himself to the Jews as their Messiah. When they officially rejected Him, He offered Himself for and to the whole world. After His resurrection He told His disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). He also informed them that after being filled with the Spirit (at Pentecost) they would be His witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Incidentally, this shows the danger of taking a verse of Scripture out of its context and giving it a universal application today. This has often been done with unfortunate and sometimes tragic results. A text must always be interpreted in the light of its context!

#### C. The Message: v. 7

"As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'" Again the Greek verb for "preach" is *kerysso*, which means "herald" or "proclaim." Preceded by "Repent," this was the message first preached by John the Baptist (3:2) and then by Jesus (4:17). In the person of Jesus the kingdom of heaven had come to earth.

The Master himself put the same idea together in the Lord's Prayer:

Your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven (6:10).

The kingdom of heaven is God's rule or reign. Wherever His will is done, there His kingdom is. We should let His will be done fully in our lives and pray that it will be extended in other lives.

Being a Christian is not just a matter of escaping hell in the next life. Rather, it is submitting our wills fully to Christ's will, letting Him rule us as Lord of all in our daily lives.

#### D. A Healing Ministry: v. 8

The apostles were commissioned to extend the varied ministries of their Master. As He had done, they also were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons.

How could they do all this? The answer is given in the first verse: Jesus "gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to cure every kind of disease and sickness." They could not, of themselves, have authority to command demons or cure diseases. But Jesus extended His divine authority to them in this ministry of healing the hurts of humanity.

Then Jesus added, "Freely you have received, freely give." The disciples had received a great gift in being with Jesus constantly. They were to share the benefits of this with others. And that is surely our responsibility today. All of God's grace is free to those who will accept it. We who have received this grace in abundance should share it with others.

### E. Taking No Money: v. 9

"Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts." Among almost all nations there have been three kinds of coins: those of gold, of silver, and of copper. It was so then and is still true today. The disciples were told to take not even a copper coin, what we call "a penny."

### F. Taking No Luggage: v. 10

They were also told not to take any "bag." The Greek word, *pera*, was sometimes used for a "beggar's bag." If that is what is meant here, the idea is that they not only were not to take any money, but they were not to beg for any, as the itinerant Cynic preachers did at that time.

Furthermore, they were not to take an extra "tunic"—the undergarment of men in that day—or sandals or a staff.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should the church engage in a healing ministry?
2. If so, how should it be conducted?
3. How can we get more workers for the harvest?
4. Why did Jesus choose twelve apostles?
5. What is the relation between the kingdom and the church?
6. What can all of us do for world missions?

Why? "For the worker is worth his keep."

Once more we must warn against the folly of taking a passage out of context. Are preachers today to follow these instructions Jesus gave at that time?

Three factors must be taken into consideration here. First, this was a short, hurried trip, only a few weeks or months at most. Second, the climate was warm and they would not need extra clothes. Third, and most significant, was the culture of that time. It was the custom always to invite a traveler in for a meal, or even to stay overnight. The disciples would not need any money, food, or extra clothes. They would be taken good care of wherever they went. They were to hasten to their task and travel light.

### G. Staying in One Home: v. 11

We have already noted that Jesus sent out His apostles "two by two." So the instruction here does not apply to a group of twelve together, but only to two men.

Whenever a pair entered a town or village, the two apostles were to "search for some worthy person and stay at his house until you leave." Going from one house to another could create problems—carrying gossip, getting involved in local problems, and that sort of thing. This would still be good advice for itinerant evangelists today.

### H. Greeting the People: vv. 12-13

What does "peace" have to do with "greeting?" Everything! For the common Jewish greeting then, as now, was the Hebrew word *Shalom*, which means "Peace!" In a deserving home there would be blessed peace.

### I. Sign of Rejection: v. 14

The Pharisees were in the habit of wiping the dust off their feet when leaving "unclean" Gentile territory. So those who rejected Christ's message

through His apostles would be considered unclean. Paul and Barnabas followed this command when they left Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:51).

#### **J. Judgment on Rejectors: v. 15**

Jesus declared that it would be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for the town

that rejected His message through the apostles. This is altogether logical, since the Jews had far more light than the ancient pagans.

Several times in the New Testament the destruction of Sodom is given as an example of divine judgment (see 11:23, 24; Luke 10:12; 17:29; Rom. 9:29; II Peter 2:6; Jude 7). It is a warning to our generation.

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### **CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

If the harvest was plentiful in Jesus' day, how about our day? The population of the world did not reach the billion mark until about 1830. It then took only one century—not several millennia—to reach the second billion in 1930. Still more amazing, the third billion took only about thirty years (1960). Today we have over four billion people in the

world, the vast majority of whom have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. In spite of the heroic efforts of earlier translators and today's four thousand Wycliff Translators, only about 1,600 out of an estimated 5,200 languages of the world have any part of Scripture. The harvest is plentiful, the workers still too few.



January 25, 1981

## LEARN FROM THE LORD

DEVOTIONAL READING	I Samuel 3:10-21
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Take My Yoke</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Take My Yoke</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 11-12 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 11:2-6, 25-30 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.</i> Matthew 11:29
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Happiness Is Obeying Jesus</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 11-12 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 11:28-30; 12:33-37 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Love God and obey his commandments.</i> I John 5:2
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	Jan. 19 M.: Hear and See, Go and Tell. Matt. 11:1-11 Jan. 20 T.: Accepting the Yoke. Matt. 11:12-30 Jan. 21 W.: Lord of the Sabbath. Matt. 12:1-8 Jan. 22 T.: Restoring to Wholeness. Matt. 12:9-21 Jan. 23 F.: Standing United. Matt. 12:22-32 Jan. 24 S.: Be Careful of Careless Words! Matt. 12:33-42 Jan. 25 S.: When Evil Returns. Matt. 12:43-50
LESSON AIM	To help us learn from the Lord more adequately.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> about A.D. 28 <b>Place:</b> Galilee
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Learn From the Lord</b> <b>I. Jesus and John the Baptist:</b> Matthew 11:2-6 A. A Disappointed Prisoner: v. 2 B. A Crucial Question: v. 3 C. The Words and Works of Jesus: v. 4 D. Healing and Evangelism: v. 5 E. A Gentle Reproof: v. 6 <b>II. An Unreasonable Generation:</b> Matthew 11:16-19 <b>III. Blessing for the Needy:</b> Matthew 11:25-27 A. The Ignorance of the Learned: vv. 25-26 B. Knowing the Father and the Son: v. 27

**IV. Rest for the Weary: Matthew 11:28-30**

A. Rest in His Presence: v. 28

B. Learning from Jesus: v. 29

C. The Easy Yoke: v. 30

Last week we studied Matthew's account of Jesus sending out His twelve apostles on a healing, preaching ministry (10:5-42).

We noted the first part of these instructions (vv. 5-15). To fill in the gap between the lessons, we want to glance briefly at some further ones.

Jesus warned His disciples that He was sending them out "like sheep among wolves" (v. 16). So they must be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." The preachers would be persecuted just as their Master was (vv. 17-25). But they were to be fearless in proclaiming His message (vv. 26-31). They must put Christ first as their Lord, no matter what the cost (vv. 32-39).

Chapter 11 begins, "After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee" (v. 1). He was not going to be idle while His men were out working for Him.

The key verse of today's lesson confronts young people with a tremendous challenge. Jesus said: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Everyone who has seen a yoke for oxen knows that it has to be worn by two. It is a cross bar with two U-shaped forms to go on the necks of the oxen.

What Jesus is asking all of us to do is to put our necks into the yoke worn by Him. That yoke symbolizes, first of all, full submission to God's will. Then it indicates that we are workers together with Jesus in carrying out the Father's will. And as we work with Him, we learn from Him how to live and work. Let's take His yoke upon us!

1. Happiness is obeying Jesus. Let's try it!
2. If we want to have real rest and peace inside, we must be gentle and humble, as Jesus was.
3. Love, joy, and peace are the greatest treasures of life.
4. We need to fill our lives with good thoughts and deeds.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS****SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH****CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN****THE LESSON COMMENTARY****I. JESUS AND JOHN THE  
BAPTIST:  
Matthew 11:2-6****A. A Disappointed Prisoner: v. 2**

"John heard in prison what Christ was doing." What he heard wasn't what he had expected to hear.

"John was in prison. Jesus was preaching, teaching, healing. Finally the lonely Baptist—accustomed to the wide open wilderness, but now confined in a cramped cell—could scarcely endure his imprisonment any longer. He had introduced Jesus as the Messiah. Doubtless he expected Him quickly to

vanquish the enemy (the Romans) and set up His own Kingdom, ruling the world in righteousness. But nothing like this was happening" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 53).

### B. A Crucial Question: v. 3

Perplexed, John sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" The expression "the Coming One" (literal Greek) is clearly a reference to the Messiah of Israel, predicted by the prophets. Suzanne de Dietrich says that it was "a classic expression, somewhat veiled, to designate the Messiah" (*Layman's Bible Commentary*, XVI, 69).

Why did John ask this question? Various theories have been proposed. Many scholars have suggested that John asked the question purely for the sake of his own disciples. They were doubting that Jesus was the Messiah and perhaps were jealous of Jesus' growing popularity. John wanted them to know that Jesus was really the Messiah.

But this seems a bit far-fetched. The question is presented as coming from John himself, and the answer is directed to John. Jesus said, "Go back and report to John" (v. 4). It is evidently John who needed the assurance.

As would be expected, a great number of scholars have held that real doubt existed in John's own mind. After all, he probably shared the common messianic expectations of that day. The Messiah was to be a deliverer of the nation and set up a political kingdom. Jesus was not fulfilling either role. Was He actually the Messiah?

The main problem with this view is that John the Baptist had twice pointed out Jesus as "the Lamb of God," adding in one case: "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36). Also, when he baptized Jesus, a voice from heaven had declared: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Admittedly it is difficult to see how John could have doubted after all

this. We would suggest, however, that it is not at all impossible that John's spirit may have become so low and discouraged that he was plagued with doubts.

After mentioning and refuting the above two theories, Henry Alford presents his own view. "John having heard all these reports, being himself fully convinced Who this wonder worker was, was becoming impatient under the slow and unostentatious course of our Lord's self-manifestation, and desired to obtain from our Lord's own mouth a declaration which should set such rumours at rest, and (possibly) which might serve for a public profession of His Messiahship, from which hitherto He had seemed to shrink. He thus incurs a share of the same rebuke which the mother of our Lord received (John ii. 4); and the purport of the answer returned him is, that the hour had not yet come for such an open declaration, but that there were sufficient proofs given by the works done, to render all inexcusable, who should be offended in Him." Alford adds, "It is a fact not to be neglected in connexion with this solution of the difficulty, that John is said to have heard of the works, not of *Jesus*, but of *Christ*: the only place where that name, standing alone, is given to our Lord in this Gospel" (*The Greek Testament*, I, 114).

This is perhaps the most satisfactory view. It does seem to fit best with all the data involved, as well as with the sturdy character of John the Baptist.

### C. The Words and Works of Jesus: v. 4

Jesus told the messengers: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see." All four Gospels record the words and works of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:1). Both, taken together, were His credentials as Messiah.

### D. Healing and Evangelism: v. 5

Jesus declared that His healing ministry reached out to five groups: the blind, lame, lepers, deaf, and dead.

Adam Clarke comments: "These miracles were not only the most convincing proofs of the supreme power of Christ, but were also emblematic of that work of salvation which He effects in the souls of men. (1) Sinners are *blind*; their understanding is so darkened by sin that they see not the way of truth and salvation (2) They are *lame*—not able to walk in the path of righteousness. (3) They are *leprous*; their souls are defiled with sin, the most loathsome and inveterate disease. (4) They are *deaf* to the voice of God, His Word, and their own consciences. (5) They are *dead* in trespasses and sins, God, who is the Life of the soul, being separated from it by iniquity. Nothing less than the power of Christ can redeem from all this; and from all this that power of Christ actually does redeem every penitent, believing soul." Clarke adds, "Giving sight to the blind and raising the dead are allowed by the ancient rabbins to be works which the Messiah should perform when He should manifest himself in Israel" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 791). So there was really no excuse for the religious leaders' rejection of Jesus.

What was the crowning evidence that He was the Messiah? "The good news is preached to the poor." This was a fulfillment of the prediction made about the Messiah in Isaiah 61:1. Compassionate love for the needy is an expression of deity. Isaiah also predicted the healing of the blind, deaf, and lame (Isa. 35:5-6).

### E. A Gentle Reproof: v. 6

Since this verse comes at the end of Jesus' answer to John the Baptist, it seems probable that it was a gentle reproof to him for asking the question he raised. Jesus said, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (KJV). The Greek verb for "be offended" is *scandalizo*, which we have taken over as *scandalize*. It came from the noun *scandalon*, which meant the bait stick of a trap or snare. So literally it meant to entrap or ensnare.

Arndt and Gingrich (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 760) say that the verb means "cause to be caught or to fall, that is, cause to sin." They say that the passive, which we have here in the Greek, can mean "fall away" (NIV).

Of all the verbs in the Greek New Testament, this is one of the hardest to translate. A member of the translation committee for the Revised Standard Version New Testament told me that this was the last word on which an official vote was taken.

## II. AN UNREASONABLE GENERATION: Matthew 11:16-19

Plaintively Jesus cried out, "To what can I compare this generation?" (v. 16). He said the people were like children sitting in the market places and calling out to others:

We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.

In other words, the first group said, "Let's play wedding," but there was no response. Then they said, "Let's play funeral." Still no response. Jesus said the people were acting like spoiled children, who are never satisfied.

Then the Master explained what He meant: "For John came neither eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her actions" (vv. 18-19).

Two words here need a word of comment before we discuss this passage. Some may wonder why "publicans" (KJV) has been changed to "tax collectors" (NIV). The reason is that "publicans" is not accurate. The *publicani* (Latin) were wealthy Romans who were assigned large territories. They, in turn, would employ local men to do



the actual collecting of the taxes. The mis-called “publicans” of the Gospels were the local Jewish “tax collectors.”

Some might also ask, “Why is ‘sinners’ put in quotation marks?” The answer is that these were people called “sinners” by the Pharisees because they did not keep all the meticulous rules and regulations of the tradition of the elders, as the Pharisees did.

“People are always quick to condemn someone they do not understand. John’s asceticism seemed so strange to his contemporaries that they said he had a demon. His unsociable nature, they thought, proved that there was something drastically wrong with him.

“Jesus’ social behavior was quite different from that of John... He joined the people at their meals and made himself friendly with all levels of society. This displeased the Jewish leaders, who thought He should keep Himself aloof, should lead a separated, not sociable, life” (*WBC*, IV, 54).

### III. BLESSING FOR THE NEEDY: Matthew 11:25-27

#### A. The Ignorance of the Learned: vv. 25-26

Though the Gospels mention a number of times when Jesus prayed, only a few of His prayers are recorded for us. Here is one of those rare gems.

“I thank thee” (KJV) is changed to “I praise Thee (NASB) or “I praise you”

(NIV). In the King James Version the Greek verb is translated “thank” only twice—here and in the parallel passage (Luke 10:21). Eight times it is rendered “confess,” its most natural meaning. Arndt and Gingrich note, “From the meaning *confess* there arose... the more general sense *praise*, of praise directed toward God” (*Lexicon*, p. 276).

Jesus addressed His Father as “Lord of heaven and earth.” At present His lordship of earth is constantly challenged. But ultimately He will rule supreme on earth as well as in heaven.

For what did Jesus praise His Father? “Because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.” The “wise” ones were the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, who prided themselves on their wisdom. But they showed their supreme folly by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. They were scholars, “learned” ones. But they had not learned the central truth of their religion: the love and mercy of God.

So “these things”—the true principles of the kingdom, as expounded in the Sermon on the Mount—were hidden from them, but revealed to “little children” (literally “infants”). Albert Barnes says this means “the poor, the ignorant, and the obscure; the teachable, the simple, the humble” (*Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament: Matthew and Mark*, p. 123). And this was according to the Father’s “good pleasure” (v. 26).

#### B. Knowing the Father and the Son: v. 27

The first statement of this verse is echoed throughout the New Testament (28:18; John 3:35; 13:3; 17:2; I Cor. 15:27). The Father gave the Son all He needed to carry out the plan of redemption.

In the next sentence of this verse the word *knows* must be taken in the absolute sense of knowing fully. Only the Son fully knows the Father. But He reveals His Father to those He chooses (see also John 7:17).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you suppose John felt in prison?
2. What works of Jesus particularly proved that He was the Messiah?
3. What example did Jesus set us in His social relationships?
4. How far should “the separated life” go?
5. How can we know God?
6. What is the secret of having true rest in our hearts?

#### IV. REST FOR THE WEARY:

Matthew 11:28-30

##### A. Rest in His Presence: v. 28

This paragraph is one of the most beautiful in the New Testament. And this verse is the most precious part of it.

It begins with the gracious invitation, "Come to me," straight from the heart of a loving Savior. "This is an expression of the Divine Nature—pure, unselfish, redemptive love" (*WBC*, IV, 56).

Who are invited to come? "All you who are weary and burdened." This has at least three applications. "It referred first of all to the Jews, whose yoke of the Law (supplemented by 'the tradition of the elders,' Mark 7:3), constituted a burden too heavy to bear (23:4; Acts 15:10). In the second place, it has reference to all sinners, who are carrying on their backs a crushing load of guilt (cf. *Pilgrim's Progress*). But this invitation should also be accepted by Christians who feel weighed down with the cares of life and perplexing problems too difficult for human solution. Jesus Christ is the great Burden-bearer" (*WBC*, IV, 56).

"I will give you rest" is literally, "I will rest you." True rest of spirit is not some object that can be handed to us as a gift. Rather, it is *His presence*. That is why Jesus said, "Come to me." In His loving presence we find that soul rest that can never be found apart from Him.

##### B. Learning from Jesus: v. 29

"Take my yoke upon you." Adam Clarke rightly observes: "Strange

paradox! that a man already weary and overloaded must take a new weight upon him, in order to be eased and find rest" (*Commentary*, p. 792).

What did Jesus mean by the "yoke"? It symbolizes submission to one's authority. "To take Christ's yoke is to acknowledge fully His lordship in one's life. It was also used in the sense of discipleship, of accepting the teachings of a certain person. This thought is borne out by the clause that follows: *and learn from me*. To take Jesus' yoke means to accept His way of life" (*WBC*, IV, 56).

What are we especially to learn from Christ? He tells us: "I am gentle and humble in heart." He would teach us by His own example. Only the humble can know true rest, because pride breeds restlessness. Also we can say that the gentleness of Jesus is the answer to the violent strife that marks our world today. What this poor world needs right now is a lot more humble, gentle people in places of responsibility.

##### C. The Easy Yoke: v.30

"For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Again we note the paradox. The one who really loves Jesus finds that doing His will is easy. Someone has well said, "Love makes all burdens light." The greatest need for every human heart is full submission to Jesus Christ as Lord of all.

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### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Probably most Americans living today have never seen an ox yoke. I was fortunate enough to be brought up on a farm where several were still around.

The yoke has places for two necks to be fastened in. To take Jesus' yoke means full submission to His will, going

with Him where He wants us to go. He accepted His Father's yoke for Him, even though it meant death on the cross. We must be willing to accept His yoke of gentle, loving, sacrificial service to others. And we must wear it all our lives.

February 1, 1981

## TRUST IN GOD'S VICTORY!

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Zephaniah 3:11-13

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Trust in God's Victory!*

**Youth Topic:** *Trust in God's Victory!*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 13:1-52

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 13:24-35

**Memory Verse:** *The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.* Matthew 13:33

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Growing to Be Like Jesus*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 13:1-52

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

**Memory Verse:** *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.* Luke 2:52

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Jan. 26 M.:** Responses to the Gospel. Matt. 13:1-9

**Jan. 27 T.:** Reasons for Parables. Matt. 13:10-17

**Jan. 28 W.:** Hearing and Understanding. Matt. 13:18-23

**Jan. 29 T.:** The Growth of the Kingdom. Matt. 13:24-33

**Jan. 30 F.:** The Time for Judgment. Matt. 13:34-43

**Jan. 31 S.:** Discovery and Discernment. Matt. 13:44-50

**Feb. 1 S.:** Judgment and Deliverance. Zeph. 3:8-13

LESSON AIM

To help us understand better the nature of the kingdom of heaven.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about A.D. 28

**Place:** by the Lake of Galilee

LESSON OUTLINE

**Trust in God's Victory**

**I. The Setting:** Matthew 13:1-3a

**II. Parable of the Sower:** Matthew 13:3b-9

**III. Explanation of the Parable:** Matthew 13:18-23

**IV. Parable of the Weeds:** Matthew 13:24-30

A. Appearance of the Weeds: vv. 24-26

B. Concern of the Servants: vv. 27-28

C. Instructions of the Owner: vv. 29-30

**V. Explanation of the Parable of the Weeds: Matthew 13:36-43**

A. Inquiry of the Disciples: v. 36

B. Identification of Items: vv. 37-39

C. Application of the Parable: vv. 40-43

**VI. Parable of the Mustard Seed: Matthew 13:31-32**

**VII. Parable of the Yeast: Matthew 13:33**

**VIII. Speaking in Parables: Matthew 13:34-35**

**IX. Parable of the Hidden Treasure: Matthew 13:44**

**X. Parable of the Precious Pearl: Matthew 13:45-46**

**XI. Parable of the Net: Matthew 13:47-50**

Today we begin our study of Unit III of this quarter: "Training for Service" (Matthew 13-18). We need to realize that all true disciples of Christ are called to serve Him.

Chapter 13 is one of the most interesting in Matthew's Gospel. It contains seven parables of the kingdom. With the exception of the first one (the sower) every parable begins with the formula: "The kingdom of heaven is like." So we have in this chapter a description of the nature of the kingdom.

This fits in, of course, with three characteristics of Matthew's Gospel. First, it is the Gospel of the kingdom. Second, it has systematic arrangement. Matthew gathers together here in one place a group of parables, as he has a group of miracles in chapters 8 and 9. Third, it shows Matthew's fondness for symbolic numbers. Seven is the number of completeness; so he has exactly seven parables here.

Youth is proverbially the time for idealism—before the hard realism of life hits us hard! Young people like to identify themselves with some great cause.

There is no greater cause in the world with which we can identify ourselves than the kingdom of God. It deals with the most important thing on earth: the eternal salvation of human souls. It is a worldwide cause, taking in every continent and country, every language and tribe. It is the most challenging cause that can claim our deepest dedication and strongest energies. It does not promise to make us wealthy in this life, but it does give the highest satisfaction here, and eternal rewards in heaven.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. When we go to church or read the Bible, seed is sown in our hearts.
2. We need to encourage its growth by prayer.



3. We must let the Word of God sink deep into our minds and hearts, so that it will grow.
4. Jesus set us the example of spiritual growth.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE SETTING:

Matthew 13:1-3a

We are told that Jesus "went out of the house" in Capernaum where He had been teaching the people—probably in a large courtyard around which the home was built—"and sat by the lake" (v. 1). The Lake of Galilee is only about twelve miles long and six or seven miles wide—hardly "the sea" (KJV) in our language today.

"Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore" (v. 2). This saved Him from being pushed into the water by the crowd. Also the water acted as a sound-ing board to "bounce" His words up to the crowd standing on the sloping shore of the lake.

"Then he told them many things in parables" (v. 3). The Greek word *parabole* literally means "thrown beside"—a story put beside a truth to illustrate it.

### II. PARABLE OF THE SOWER:

Matthew 13:3b-9

This parable is found in all three synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8). It is one of the most familiar of Jesus' many parables.

Jesus told about a farmer going out to sow some seed. Possibly at that moment a man was walking across a nearby field in plain sight. He would dip his hand into a bag slung over his shoulder and scatter the seed with wide sweeps of his arm—as one can see men in Palestine doing in our day.

"As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up." (v. 4). The seed did not penetrate the hardened surface, and so the birds quickly devoured it.

"Some fell on rocky places" (v. 5). "Stony places" (KJV) suggests ground covered with small stones, but "the soil was shallow" shows that it was thin soil on top of a ledge of rock. This soil, if moist, would be warm, and so the seed "sprang up quickly." But soon the hot sun dried out the soil and scorched the plants. Because they had no solid roots, they withered (v. 6).

Some seed "fell among thorns" (v. 7), which grew up and choked the plants. Weeds always seem to grow faster than desirable plants!

"Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (v. 8). Then Jesus added the admonition: "He who has ears, let him hear" (v. 9).

This parable of the sower, as it has been familiarly called, is now sometimes designated the parable of the soils. For the point of the parable is the difference in the four types of soil.

### III. EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE:

Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus proceeded to explain the symbolism of the four kinds of soil. The hard soil on the path represents people who hear the message of the kingdom but do not understand it; it doesn't sink in. These people are not even converted. The birds represent "the evil one," Satan, who "snatches away what was sown in the heart" (v. 19). Henry Alford makes this interesting observation: "By fowls of the air—passing thoughts and desires, which seem insignificant and even innocent—does Satan do his work, and rob the heart of the precious seed" (*The Greek Testament*, I, 141).

The thin soil on top of solid rock represents people with shallow souls. They receive the message "with joy" (v.

20). But because they have no root, they last "only a short time" (v. 20). Here we have people who react emotionally but have no depth of intellect or purpose. They do not put down their roots in deep repentance, based on a godly sorrow for sin. They live thin lives spiritually. When the heat of persecution strikes them, they wither and die.

Then we come to the third item: "What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful" (v. 22).

The thorns constitute the greatest threat to every Christian. The cluttering cares of our daily doings can strangle our spiritual life. Too busy to pray—choked, strangled, starved, dead. And the desire to make money can be the cause of our downfall. Riches are deceitful: they promise much and give little. We spend all our time and energy accumulating them, and then they sell us short.

The fourth soil represents "the man who hears the word and understands it." But even here we have three levels—"a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (v. 23). We choose our level.

In this parable we find: (1) the stolid heart; (2) the shallow heart; (3) the strangled heart; (4) the steady heart. Which are we?

#### IV. PARABLE OF THE WEEDS:

Matthew 13:24-30

##### A. Appearance of the Weeds: vv. 24-26

While the parable of the sower is found in all three synoptic Gospels (John has no parables), the parable of the weeds is only in Matthew. It differs from the preceding parable in this way: in the parable of the sower all the seed is good, and it is the soils that differ; here the soil is all the same, but good and bad seeds are sown in it.

Jesus said that the kingdom is like a man who sowed good seed in his field (v. 24). "But while everyone was sleeping,

his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away" (v. 25).

The Greek word for "weeds" (traditionally called "tares") is *zizania*. It evidently refers to a bearded "darnel" (NEB) that looks almost exactly like wheat while growing.

Jesus went on: "When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared" (v. 26). The wheat and the darnel are at first very difficult to distinguish, but as the heads ripen the difference becomes clear.

Alford comments on this passage: "Our Lord was speaking of an act of malice practiced in the East: persons of revengeful disposition watch the ground of a neighbour being ploughed, and in the night following sow destructive weeds." Astonishingly, Alford adds this bit of information: "The practice is not unknown even in England at present. Since the publication of the first edition of this commentary, a field belonging to the Editor, at Gaddesby in Leicestershire, was maliciously sown with charlock... over the wheat" (*Greek Testament*, I, 143).

##### B. Concern of the Servants: vv. 27-28

The owner's servants reported the matter to him: "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in the field? Where then did the weeds come from?" (v. 27).

His answer was, "An enemy did this" (v. 28). He did not say "my enemy" or "the enemy." So there is no indication that he knew who was guilty.

The servants suggested a course of action: "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" This seemed the natural thing to do.

##### C. Instructions of the Owner: vv. 29-30

The owner realized that there were dangers in this proposal. So he answered, "No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them" (v. 29). Anyone who

has ever weeded a garden knows how real this danger is.

So the owner's instructions were to let both grow together until the harvest. Then the separation would be made (v. 30).

A. M. Hunter makes this comment: "The parable sounds like Jesus' reply to a critic—probably a Pharisee (the very name meant 'separatist')—who had objected: 'If the Kingdom of God is really here, why has there not been a separating of sinners from saints in Israel?'" (*Interpreting the Parables*, p. 46).

How would they "collect the weeds"? Joachim Jeremias suggests: "By the gathering out of the darnel we are not to understand that it was rooted up immediately before the reaping of the grain, but that, as the reaper cut the grain with his sickle, he let the darnel fall, so that it was not gathered into the sheaves" (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 156).

## V. EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS: Matthew 13:36-43

### A. Inquiry of the Disciples: v. 36

After telling the added parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (vv. 31-33), Jesus "left the crowd and went into the house"—probably Peter's house in Capernaum. There the disciples came to Him with a request: "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

### B. Identification of Items: vv. 37-39

Joachim Jeremias and others have insisted strongly that we must seek for just one point of teaching in each of the parables of Jesus; we must not interpret them allegorically. But we are confronted here with the fact that Jesus gave an allegorical interpretation of the first two parables in this chapter. He explained the symbolism of each item in the parable of the sower, and He now does it in even greater detail in the parable of the weeds. He told His disci-

ples: "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels." That is about as detailed and specific as one could be!

### C. Application of the Parable: vv. 40-43.

Jesus said that as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, "so it will be at the end of the age" (Greek, *aionos*) not "world" (KJV). He continued: "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin, and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (vv. 40-43).

The expression "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is used five times by Matthew (8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) and once by Luke (13:28). It is a very solemn warning against the horrors of hell.

"This parable teaches two things: (1) it is not our task to separate saints from sinners; (2) there will be a final and eternal separation at the end of this period of probation" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 65).

## VI. PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED: Matthew 13:31-32

This parable, like that of the sower, is found in all three synoptic Gospels (see Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19). Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man planted. It is here labeled "the least of all seeds" (v. 32, KJV). Actually, the mustard is not the smallest seed known to botanists today. But it was at that time used proverbially as the smallest seed, and Jesus adopted this customary sense in order to make a point. That is why the



New International Version reads: "Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

Alfred Plummer observes: "'Small as a mustard seed' was a Jewish proverb to indicate a very minute particule" (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 194). And William M. Thompson tells of seeing a mustard tree more than twelve feet high near the Jordan River (*The Land and the Book*, II, 163).

### VII. PARABLE OF THE YEAST: Matthew 13:33

This parable is also recorded by Luke (13:20-21), but not by Mark. It has the same general interpretations as the previous one.

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." In the Greek "a large amount" is literally "three sats," which equaled about a bushel. The yeast caused the dough to rise in preparation for baking.

What is the meaning of these two parables? "The vast majority of commentators from earliest times have interpreted those two parables as relating to the growth of the church. The former describes its outward growth (like a tree), while the latter depicts its inward growth. The church would flourish throughout the earth, in spite of its very small beginnings. At the same time its unseen influence would 'leaven' human society" (*WBC*, IV, 65-66).

In the last century some have insisted that "leaven" always means evil in the Bible. So they have said that these two parables foretold the evil growth of the worldly church. But the other interpretation fits the context better.

### VIII. SPEAKING IN PARABLES: Matthew 13:34-35

"Jesus spoke all these things to the crowds in parables, and he did not say

anything to them without using a parable" (v. 34). This links in with verse 10, where we find the disciples asking Jesus: "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" His answer was, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them" (v. 11).

Mark has the same statement that we find here in the second half of verse 34. He adds, "But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything" (Mark 4:34).

In Matthew 13:13 Jesus indicates that the reason He spoke to the people in parables was because they did not understand His straightforward teaching; they had to have illustrations. There is also a hint that they would not be held quite as guilty for rejecting His teachings if He spoke in parables rather than directly.

Verse 35 quotes Psalm 78:2 as a prophecy of Jesus' parabolic ministry. In verses 14-15 we have a longer quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10. The people's hearts were dull so that they did not understand the message.

### IX. PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE: Matthew 13:44

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can we do to help shallow hearts?
2. How can we avoid having a strangled heart?
3. How can we produce more fruit? (cf. John 15:1-5).
4. How should failing church members be treated?
5. How are light and salt (Matt. 5:13-16) related to the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast?
6. How do you harmonize *free* salvation with giving all to get it?



it, he hid it again, and then in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field."

## X. THE PARABLE OF THE PRECIOUS PEARL:

Matthew 13:45-46

"Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

These two parables are found only in Matthew, and they teach the same lesson.

"Two applications have been given: (1) that Christ gave His all to purchase the church; (2) that a man should be willing to give his all in order to gain salvation. The second is more likely what Jesus had in mind. . . . The lesson, then, is that salvation is worth one's complete consecration.

"There is one slight difference in the two parables. In the first the man stumbles accidentally on a hidden treasure; in the second the merchant is seeking valuable pearls and finally finds one. This suggests two types of converts. One is confronted suddenly with the gospel and receives it joyfully. The other searches long for a religion that will satisfy and at last discovers the truth in Jesus Christ" (*WBC*, IV, 66).

## XI. PARABLE OF THE NET:

Matthew 13:47-50

This forms a doublet with the parable of the weeds. Both are found only in Matthew. The lesson of both is the same: A final day of judgment and separation is coming.

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was "like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish" (v. 47). "When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away" (v. 48). The application (vv. 49-50) is the same as in the parable of the weeds (vv. 41-42).

"The distinctive emphasis of this parable is on the large seine that is dragged through the water, enclosing a multitude of fish, both good and bad. So the Gospel-net catches both good and bad. But the separation of these is to be left for the final judgment day" (*WBC*, IV, 66).

The main lesson of the parable is spelled out this way by R. C. Trench: "That we be not content with being included within the Gospel-net, since they are not all Israel who are of Israel. . . . since despite of all the confusions of the visible Church, 'the Lord knoweth them that are His,' and will one day bring these confusions to an end, separating the precious from the vile" (*Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, p. 118).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The topic for today's lesson is "Trust in God's Victory!" This is highlighted especially in the twin parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. In both cases a large growth takes place.

The church of Jesus Christ started with only a handful of disciples in a small country on the shores of the Mediterranean. But it has grown into a great company of multiplied millions, living on every continent and in almost every country.

We should not be discouraged if the work sometimes seems slow and small; God is able to work miracles.

The other parable of our Scripture lesson, that of the weeds, warns us that we are not to act as judges against those who may fail to possess what they profess. If we root them hastily out of the church, we may tear out some good people too.

February 8, 1981

## HAVE COMPASSION

DEVOTIONAL READING	Jonah 3:1-10
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Have Compassion</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Care!</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 13:53—15:39 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 15:29-39 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>He saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick.</i> Matthew 14:14
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Showing Kindness to Everyone</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 13:53—15:39 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 14:13-21 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.</i> Ephesians 4:32
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	Feb. 2 M.: Miracles That Did Not Happen. Matt. 13:53-58 Feb. 3 T.: Dinner for Five Thousand. Matt. 14:14-21 Feb. 4 W.: Walking on Water. Matt. 4:22-27 Feb. 5 T.: The Higher Law. Matt. 15:1-11 Feb. 6 F.: A Faith That Won. Matt. 15:21-28 Feb. 7 S.: The Making of a Miracle. Matt. 15:29-39 Feb. 8 S.: They Believed and Were Spared. Jonah 3:1-10
LESSON AIM	To remind us of our obligation to have compassion on those in need of help.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> about A.D. 28 <b>Place:</b> Tyre and Sidon (Phoenicia) and the Lake of Galilee.
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Have Compassion</b> <b>I. Controversy About Clean and Unclean:</b> Matthew 15:1-20 A. Complaint of the Pharisees: vv. 1-2 B. Jesus' Reply: vv. 3-9 C. Real Cause of Uncleanness: vv. 10-11 D. Problems of the Disciples: vv. 12-15 E. Jesus' Explanation: vv. 16-20

**II. Faith of the Canaanite Woman: Matthew 15:21-28**

- A. The Need: vv. 21-22
- B. Silence: v. 23
- C. Exclusion: v. 24
- D. Rebuff: vv. 25-27
- E. Reward: v. 28

**III. Feeding of the Four Thousand: Matthew 15:29-39**

- A. The Setting: v. 29
- B. A Healing Ministry: v. 30
- C. Amazement and Praise: v. 31
- D. Jesus' Compassion: v. 32
- E. Protest of the Disciples: v. 33
- F. Checking the Assets: v. 34
- G. Seating the Crowd: v. 35
- H. Feeding the Crowd: v. 36
- I. Plenty of Food: v. 37
- J. Size of the Crowd: v. 38
- K. Crossing the Lake: v. 39

Last week we looked at the seven parables of the kingdom found in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. Today we concentrate our attention on chapter 15.

In the fourteenth we find three main incidents. The first is the death of John the Baptist (vv. 1-12). When "Herod the tetrarch" (v. 1)—Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee—heard the reports about Jesus, his immediate reaction was, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead!" (v. 2). His conscience still bothered him.

And well it might! He had gone to Rome and stayed at his brother Philip's home. He repaid this kindness by stealing his brother's wife! When he returned to Galilee with her, John told him, "It is not lawful for you to have her" (v. 4). Enraged, Herod wanted to kill John, but feared a popular uprising (v. 5). Then Herodias, who hated John, cleverly arranged a trap, into which Herod fell (vv. 6-9). John the Baptist was beheaded (vv. 10-12).

The second incident is the feeding of the five thousand (vv. 13-21). This is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels (see Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14).

The third incident is Jesus walking on the water (vv. 22-33). This is recorded also by Mark (6:45-52) and John (6:16-21). Matthew, but not Mark or John, also describes Peter walking on the water (vv. 28-31).

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

"I don't care!" "I couldn't care less!" are two favorite modern exclamations, but the youth topic today is a one-word exclamation: "Care!"

Jesus cared; and that should settle the question for us, for if we are Christians we must follow Christ's example.

The basis of meaningful caring is a genuine compassion for those in need. And that compassion—literally, "suffer-

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

ing with"—is generated by the love that God puts in our hearts when Jesus, who is Divine Love, comes in.

Compassion is also fostered by our deliberately becoming alert to the needs of others. There is need all around us, but we tend not to see it.

Needs are of many kinds: physical, financial, social, emotional, spiritual. We should be alert to these needs and then seek to do something about them. This takes time, love, and prayer.

## CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. We should show kindness to everybody.
2. Jesus can help us to help others, if we pray about it.
3. Jesus felt sorry for the people and met their need.
4. He also used His disciples in doing this, and He wants to use us today.

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## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. CONTROVERSY ABOUT CLEAN AND UNCLEAN: Matthew 15:1-20

#### A. Complaint of the Pharisees: vv. 1-2

The feeding of the five thousand evidently took place on the east side of the Lake of Galilee (John 6:1)—contrary to what guides show tourists today! Then Jesus returned to the west side of the lake. In 14:34 we read: "When they had crossed over, they landed at Genesaret." This was a narrow plain on the western side of the north end of the Lake of Galilee.

"Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem" (v. 1). This was a distance of about a hundred miles—a long walk for the Pharisees, who preferred not to ride on animals. Why did they come all this distance?

Verse 2 suggests that they came with the purpose of checking up on this new prophet of Galilee, whose words and works in Judea had already provoked their animosity (John 2:12-25; 4:1-3; 5:1-18). Now their critical attitude is shown by what they said to Jesus: "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash

their hands before they eat." That is, the disciples did not follow the elaborate ceremonial washing prescribed by "the tradition of the elders." This was a very wordy set of rules and regulations that the rabbis had added to the law of Moses, spelling out multitudinous applications in minute detail. The Pharisees were insistent that all these rules be studiously observed.

#### B. Jesus' Reply: vv. 3-9

Christ answered their question by asking them a very startling one: "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (v. 3). We can almost hear the Pharisees ex-postulating, "What do you mean?"

Jesus proceeded to give an example of how they did this. God said, "Honor your father and mother"—the fifth of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 29:12)—and "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death" (Exod. 21:17). But the Pharisees were teaching that if a man said to his father or mother, "Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God," he was not to honor his father with the money the parents needed. "Thus you nullify the



word of God for the sake of your tradition" (v. 6). It is no wonder that Jesus called them "hypocrites" (v. 7) and quoted a passage from Isaiah that described them well (vv. 8-9).

### C. Real Cause of Uncleanness: vv. 10-11

Jesus called the crowd to Him. After telling the people to "Listen and understand" (v. 10), He made this important assertion: "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean'" (v. 11). In other words, the real cause of uncleanness is not the eating of unclean foods but having an unclean heart.

### D. Problems of the Disciples: vv. 12-15

The disciples were seeing and hearing all that was going on; and they thought they ought to inform their Master of the reaction to what He had said. So they came to Him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" (v. 12).

In reply Jesus intimated that the Pharisees—or their wrong teachings—were plants that His Father had not planted, and they would be pulled up by the roots (v. 13). He went on to say that these religious leaders were "blind guides" (v. 14). They and their followers would fall into a pit (or ditch).

Peter had another problem. Speaking for all the disciples he said to Jesus: "Explain the parable to us" (v. 15).

It is not immediately obvious what this "parable" is. Alford thinks it "clearly" refers to verse 11, and that is probably the best suggestion. "Parable" here is taken in its broader meaning of "comparison" or "similitude." Jesus is comparing (or contrasting) the material and the spiritual.

### E. Jesus' Explanation: vv. 16-20

"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked the disciples (v. 16). If they couldn't

understand, how could the crowd be expected to do so?

First the *material*: "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?" (v. 17). Then the *spiritual*: "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'" (v. 18). Many places in Scripture, especially in Paul's Epistles, we find a list of sins. But verse 19 (with the parallel in Mark 7:21) is the main one in the Gospels. Matthew names seven, Mark thirteen. These all come "from the heart."

Jesus added, "These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean'" (v. 20).

## II. FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN

Matthew 15:21-28

### A. The Need: v. 21-22

Leaving the Lake of Galilee, on whose shores most of His public ministry took place, "Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon" (v. 21). These are the two most southern cities on the Mediterranean coast of Lebanon, then called Phoenicia. They are just north of Israel and only a few miles apart.

"A Canaanite woman from that vicinity," a descendant of the ancient Canaanites who inhabited this area, came to Jesus, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession" (v. 22). "Son of David" was a title for the Messiah. So this woman had some knowledge of the Jewish religion. From Mark 3:8 and Luke 6:17 we learn that people came from the region of Tyre and Sidon to hear Jesus' teaching and see His miracles.

Adam Clarke gives this characterization of her prayer: "(1) It is short, (2) humble, (3) full of faith, (4) fervent, (5) modest, (6) respectful, (7) rational, (8) relying only on the mercy of God, (9) persevering" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 801).

**B. Silence: v. 23**

"Jesus did not answer a word." This seems cruel, and unlike the Master. But He wanted to test her faith, and probably also to teach His disciples a needed lesson.

Their attitude shows up immediately: "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." They were embarrassed and disgusted. Unfortunately, they showed that they had not yet caught their Master's spirit of compassion.

**C. Exclusion: v. 24**

To our surprise, we find Jesus giving His disciples this answer: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." It seems as if He was saying obliquely to the woman: "Sorry, but you are a Gentile, and my ministry is just for Israel."

But again we must realize that Jesus was testing her faith, to raise it to a higher level, as He did with Mary and Martha (John 11:1-6). So He first confronted her with silence, and then with exclusion. It is a great tribute to her noble character and strong faith that she held on persistently in spite of all this.

**D. Rebuff: vv. 25-27**

Now the woman came near and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said (v. 25). The Greek verb for "help" literally means "Come quickly at the cry of one who calls for help." She was in dead earnest!

Again we are surprised at Jesus' answer: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (v. 26). But there is more here than lies on the surface. "The Jews considered all the Gentiles to be *dogs*. But Jesus used a word which means 'little dogs' or 'puppies'—not the despised scavenger mongrels of an Oriental village but the pet dogs in the house. Weatherford makes the further suggestion that Jesus used this language as a reproof of His disciples' attitude in resenting this for-

eign woman, and that He may even have spoken with a meaningful twinkle in His eye" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 72). The New International Version helpfully translates: "their dogs."

The woman's answer (v. 27) shows that she caught on to what Jesus meant. She was glad to have even the crumbs that were given to puppies.

**E. Reward: v. 28**

The great faith of the woman earned her the reward she needed. Her daughter was immediately healed.

### III. FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND: Matthew 15:29-39

**A. The Setting: v. 29**

"Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up into the hills and sat down." But Mark's Gospel spells it out more precisely: he tells us that when Jesus left the area of Tyre and Sidon He went "down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis" (Mark 7:31). This shows that the feeding of the four thousand, like that of the feeding of the five thousand, took place on the quiet eastern side of the lake.

**B. A Healing Ministry: v. 30**

We have already noted that medical science was almost unknown among the Jews of that day. (The Greeks excelled in this field.) If Jesus had not healed the afflicted people, most of them would have suffered the rest of their lives, and many would have died at an early age. It was His love and compassion for those in need that caused Him to heal all that were brought to Him.

**C. Amazement and Praise: v. 31**

This verse suggests another reason why Jesus carried on His healing ministry: It brought praise to God. We know

from other passages that it also caused people to believe in Him as the Son of God and Messiah. Nothing like this had ever happened before; it must be that the Messiah had come!

#### D. Jesus' Compassion: v. 32

The title of our lesson today is "Have Compassion." So here we come to the heart of the lesson.

Jesus called His disciples to Him and said: "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

A rather literal translation of the Greek word for "I have compassion" would be, "I am deeply moved in my inner being." The verb comes from the noun that literally means "inward parts"—"figuratively, of the seat of the emotions, in our usage *heart* . . . mostly as the seat and source of love" (W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 770). So the full force would be: "From the depths of my heart I am stirred with love for these people."

I have on several occasions called attention to the fact that our word *compassion*, which comes from the Latin, literally means "suffering with." Too often this term is confused with "pity," which may be relatively superficial. But true compassion is a costly thing; it involves suffering on our part. Jesus set

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were the Pharisees always finding fault with Jesus?
2. Do legalism and compassion go together?
3. What is real uncleanness in God's sight?
4. What is the peril of over-emphasis on ceremony?
5. How can this be avoided?
6. What are some ways in which we can express our compassion?

us the example when He suffered with needy humanity.

Jesus' whole ministry on earth was one of compassion. Compassion for lost mankind made Him come to earth in the first place. His was a suffering, saving ministry throughout, and it culminated in His supreme, unparalleled suffering for us on the cross.

#### E. Protest of the Disciples: v. 33

To the disciples it seemed that there was nothing that could be done about the situation. They said, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" The east side of the Lake of Galilee was sparsely settled. That is why Jesus retired there at times for needed rest. The disciples looked only at the outward situation.

#### F. Checking the Assests: v. 34

What the disciples were practically saying was, "We have nothing." But Jesus asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" We must remember that these "loaves" were not like our one-pound loaves of bread, composed of a score or more of slices. The "loaf" of that day was about the size of a thin breakfast biscuit or a small pancake—less than one slice of our modern loaf.

The disciples checked and answered, "Seven, and a few small fish." It will be recalled that in the case of the feeding of the five thousand there were five loaves and two small fish (14:17).

#### G. Seating the Crowd: v. 35

"He told the crowd to sit down on the ground." That must have been a welcome word of command! Jesus wanted everything done in a quiet, orderly way, as in the feeding of the five thousand. God is not the author of confusion. When confusion occurs, it is because of human fumbling or ill will.

#### H. Feeding the Crowd: v. 36

Jesus "took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he



broke them and gave them to the disciples and they in turn to the people." The Master left us an example in His regular custom of giving thanks for food. His breaking of the loaves and fish was a symbol of sharing what we have with others.

It is very important to note that the disciples had a vital part in the miracle of feeding this large crowd, as also the earlier one. Only Jesus could *multiply* the loaves and fish, but only the disciples could *distribute* the broken pieces.

This carries a powerful message to us today. Without the divine miracle the people cannot be fed the Bread of Life. But how is Christ carried to the masses of our country, to say nothing of the endless millions of people around the world? The answer is: by the church. It is still Jesus' disciples who must carry the message of salvation to lost people everywhere.

### I. Plenty of Food: v. 37

"They all ate and were satisfied." Everybody had all he wanted to eat. That is the way God does things!

"Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over." That shows the superabundance of supply.

"Just as the number of loaves differed from the number on hand at the previous feeding, so did the number of baskets. This time there were seven baskets full. And a different word for 'basket' is used. In the earlier account the term referred to the lunch baskets of the twelve apostles. Here the word

may be translated 'hamper'—an item sometimes used as a receptacle for wheat." (*WBC*, IV, 73). The word for "basket" here is the one used in Acts 9:25 for the basket in which Paul escaped from the wall in Damascus. So these seven baskets may actually have held more than the twelve baskets used at the feeding of the five thousand.

### J. Size of the Crowd: v. 38

"The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children." The last clause is also used in connection with Matthew's account of the feeding of the five thousand (14:21), but not in Mark's account of either event. Matthew was writing to Jews, and in Jewish circles the women and children had to eat separately from the men. This was not true among the Romans, to whom Mark wrote, or the Greeks, to whom Luke and John wrote. (Neither Luke or John has this clause.)

It should be noted that the feeding of the four thousand is recorded only in Matthew (15:32-38) and Mark (8:1-10).

### K. Crossing the Lake: v. 39

"After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat"—doubtless Peter's boat—"and went to the city of Magadan." It is rather clear that "Magdala" (KJV) is a scribal "correction." Since Magadan is unknown, some copyist evidently changed it to the familiar Magdala. In any case the town was on the west side of the Lake of Galilee.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

It should not have to be argued that one of the greatest needs in the world today is for compassion. One night on the television news I saw masses of Vietnamese refugees who had escaped. The statement was made that probably 60 percent of those who fled lost their lives. A few nights earlier there had

been a report of scores of flood victims dying. And on and on it goes.

But the greatest tragedy is that millions are dying daily without knowing Jesus Christ as Savior. We must ask the compassionate Christ to stir our hearts with real compassion for needy souls—and bodies—everywhere.



February 15, 1981

## LIVE YOUR FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING	Isaiah 58:5-12
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Live Your Faith</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Live Your Faith</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 16-17 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 16:13-26 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.</i> Matthew 16:24
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Following Jesus</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 16-17 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 16:13-25 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.</i> Matthew 16:24
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>Feb. 9 M.:</b> Blind to the Signs. Matt. 16:1-12 <b>Feb. 10 T.:</b> The Great Promise. Matt. 16:13-20 <b>Feb. 11 W.:</b> Losing and Finding Life. Matt. 16:21-26 <b>Feb. 12 T.:</b> Blessing Out of the Past. Matt. 17:1-8 <b>Feb. 13 F.:</b> The Way of the Cross. Matt. 17:9-13 <b>Feb. 14 S.:</b> The Essential Faith. Matt. 17:14-23 <b>Feb. 15 S.:</b> The Lord Will Answer. Isa. 58:8-12
LESSON AIM	To teach us how to live our faith.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> A.D. 29 <b>Place:</b> Caesarea Philippi, in northern Galilee.
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Live Your Faith</b> <b>I. Peter's Confession at Caesarea Philippi:</b> Matthew 16:13-20 A. The Prior Question: v. 13 B. The Many Answers: v. 14 C. The Important Question: v. 15 D. The Correct Answer: v. 16 E. A Divine Revelation: v. 17 F. The Foundation Rock: v. 18 G. The Keys of the Kingdom: v. 19 H. The Necessary Warning: v. 20

**II. Prediction of the Passion: Matthew 16:21-23**

- A. A New Message: v. 21
- B. A Natural Reaction: v. 22
- C. A Firm Rebuke: v. 23

**III. Pattern of Christ: Matthew 16:24-26**

- A. The Way of the Cross: v. 24
- B. Losing to Find: v. 25
- C. The Value of the Soul: v. 26

The total lesson today covers chapters 16 and 17, with the main focus on Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi and its implications (16:13-26). By way of introduction we want to look at the first twelve verses of chapter 16.

Usually "the Pharisees and Sadducees" (v. 1) were sworn enemies. But, as sometimes happens today, they got together in their opposition to Jesus. They "came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven"—that is, a spectacular sign of proof that He was indeed the Messiah.

In reply Jesus chided them. They could understand the weather signs in the sky, "but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (v. 3). Then He sternly rebuked them: "A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah" (v. 4; see 12:40).

In verses 5 and 6 we find Jesus warning the disciples to be on their guard against "the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They finally caught on that He was talking about the *teaching* of these religious leaders.

*Live your faith* is a constant challenge. It is one thing to profess that we believe in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, yet quite another to live out that faith in our daily lives.

This lesson is full of significance for young people. Jesus declared that if we try to hold on to our own life, to live it selfishly for our own fame or fortune, we will finally lose it all. But if we lose ourselves in loving, sacrificial service to others, we will find ourselves in a new, higher, and eternal dimension.

The most important choice we can make is to live for Christ—every day, in every way. When we give our all to Him, He gives His all to us. There is no other way worth living! Multiplied thousands can testify that it pays to serve Jesus. Let's do it!

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. There is nothing in life as important as following Jesus.
2. We must find Him as our Savior before we can follow Him.
3. Following Him is a life long assignment.
4. The rewards of following Him are great.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. PETER'S CONFESSION AT CAESAREA PHILIPPI: Matthew 16:13-20

#### A. The Prior Question: v. 13

To get away from the crowds, and instruct His disciples, Jesus went to the far north of Galilee, to the vicinity of "Caesarea Philippi." It was so designated to distinguish it from the Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean, just south of Mount Carmel, which Herod the Great had built as his magnificent capital city and named in honor of the Emperor Caesar Augustus. This one was built by Herod's son, Philip, and named for Tiberius Caesar.

"It was located at the foot of Mount Hermon, which is snow-capped the year around (9,166 ft.). Near the city was the main source of the Jordan River, where it leaps forth from a cleft in the rock. Here had been carried on the worship of the Roman god Pan ('All'), so that the town had been called Paneas (modern Banias). It was about twenty-five miles north of Bethsaida Julias, which was on the northeastern shore of the Lake of Galilee. Here at the worship of the ancient All-god, Jesus called forth a confession of His messiahship" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 75).

Jesus had a very important question with which to challenge His disciples. By way of introduction He asked them a prior question: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" This is the name by which Jesus most frequently referred to Himself—over eighty times in the Gospels.

#### B. The Many Answers: v. 14

In reply to Jesus' question, the disciples reported that there were at least four answers. Some said that Jesus was John the Baptist. We have already seen (14:1-2) that Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, declared that Jesus was John the Baptist "risen from the dead." Evi-

dently others thought the same. Others said that He was Elijah—not the Messiah, but the forerunner (Mal. 4:5-6). Because He was warning of the coming destruction of the nation for its sins, others called Him Jeremiah. More vaguely, He was identified by still others as "one of the prophets."

#### C. The Important Question: v. 15

It is interesting to find out what others think about Jesus. But the all-important question is what *we* think of Him.

So Jesus confronted them with the crucial question: "But *you*, who do you say me to be?" (literal Greek). The "you" is very emphatic in the original. This is brought out well in the New International Version rendering: "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'" The Master put His disciples on the spot!

#### D. The Correct Answer: v. 16

Peter, the spokesman of the apostles, rose magnificently to the occasion. He came back with this definite reply: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Once more we note that "the Christ" in Greek (*ho Christos*) means "the anointed one," the same as *mashia* (Messiah) in Hebrew. So Peter identified Jesus definitely as the promised Messiah of Israel. He also confessed the deity of Jesus, "The Son of the living God." It was a noble confession of faith.

Adam Clarke writes: "Every word here is emphatic—a most concise, and yet comprehensive, confession of faith. *The Christ*, or 'Messiah,' points out His divinity, and shows His office; *the Son* designates His person. On this account it is that both are joined together so frequently in the new covenant. *Of the living God*—literally of God the living One. *Living*—a character applied to the Supreme Being, not only to distinguish Him from the dead idols of paganism,

but also to point Him out as the Source of life, present, spiritual, and eternal. Probably there is an allusion here to the great name *Yehovah*, which properly signifies being or existence" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 802).

### E. A Divine Revelation: v. 17

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." The Aramaic word for "son" is "Bar" (KJV). Peter's father carried the name of the ancient prophet Jonah.

Jesus declared that Peter was "blessed" because he had learned the true doctrine not from men but by a direct revelation from God. "One does not believe in the deity of Jesus by any theological argument or ecclesiastical dogma but only because of a divine revelation, an inner certification by the Spirit" (*WBC*, IV, 75).

### F. The Foundation Rock: v. 18

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

This is obviously a problem passage. The Roman Catholic church, of course, holds that the church of Jesus Christ is built on Peter as its foundation.

There are two pertinent New Testament passages. Paul declared: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). But he also wrote: "Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20). Of course it should be noted that Paul does not name Peter alone as the foundation.

The crux of the problem is whether or not "this rock" (Matt. 16:18) refers to Peter. The Greek for "Peter" is *petros*, which means "stone." But the word for "rock" is *petra*, which George Abbott-Smith defines as "a mass of live rock as distinct from *petros*, a detached stone

or boulder" (*Manual Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 359). Some scholars insist that Jesus was speaking here in Aramaic, where only one word, *Kepha*, could be used. But it is altogether possible that in this Greek-influenced area Jesus spoke in Greek. In any case, we have to recognize the distinction in the Greek text of Matthew's Gospel.

Adam Clarke puts it well: "Peter signifies a stone, or fragment of a 'rock'; and our Lord, whose constant custom it was to rise to heavenly things through the medium of earthly, takes occasion from the name, the metaphorical meaning of which was 'strength' and 'stability,' to point out the solidity of the confession, and the stability of that cause which should be founded on 'the Christ, the son of the living God.'" Clarke goes on to say, "'Upon this very rock,' this true confession of yours—that I am the Messiah, that I am come to reveal and communicate the living God, that the dead, lost world may be saved—upon this very Rock, myself, thus confessed, will I build My Church" (*Commentary*, p. 802).

We would agree with the concise statement of W. C. Allen: "Upon this rock of revealed truth I will build my Church." He goes on to say: "The play upon *Petros* and *petra* means, 'You have given expression to a revealed truth, and your name *Petros* suggests a metaphorical name for it. It shall be *petra* or rock upon which the Church shall stand. In other words, it shall be the central doctrine of the Church's teaching'" (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 176). If the church had been built on Peter it would never have survived!

### G. The Keys of the Kingdom: v. 19

"Verse 19 is also the despair of many interpreters. In what sense did Peter receive 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven'? It seems best to explain this language in the light of the Book of Acts. At Pentecost Peter used the keys to unlock the door of the kingdom of heaven to Jews and proselytes, and



three thousand entered that day. A little later he used the same keys to unlock the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, and thus began the mission to the nations" (*WBC*, IV, 75-76).

A. T. Robertson makes this helpful observation: "Every preacher uses the keys of the kingdom when he proclaims the terms of salvation in Christ" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, I, 135).

Jesus went on to say: "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." The "you" is singular here in the Greek. But in 18:18 Jesus said the same thing to all the apostles, using "you" in the plural. So it was not restricted to Peter.

Henry Alford shows how this worked out in Peter's case. He writes, "Of the *binding*, the case of Ananias and Sapphira may serve as an eminent example: of the *loosing* . . . the lame man at the beautiful gate of the Temple" (*The Greek Testament*, I, 174).

Similarly John Wesley comments, "Under the terms of *binding* and *loosing* are contained all those acts of discipline which Peter and his brethren performed as apostles; and undoubtedly, what they thus performed on earth, God confirmed in heaven" (*Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, p. 82). It should be observed that among the Jewish rabbis to "bind" meant to forbid and "loose" meant to permit.

### H. The Necessary Warning: v. 20

Why did Jesus warn His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah? Because it would probably have precipitated a popular "Messianic revolution" against Rome. Christ did not want this.

## II. PREDICTION OF THE PASSION:

### Matthew 16:21-23

#### A. A New Message: v. 21

"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go

to Jerusalem. . . ." The language here shows that Christ was making a new beginning. The confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Up to this point it had been mainly a ministry to the crowds: teaching, preaching, healing. From now on the Master would be devoting much of His time to instructing His disciples. He needed to prepare them for the time when He would leave them.

Here we have the first prediction of the passion. We shall find a second one in 17:22-23 and a third one in 20:17-19.

Why did Jesus wait until now to give these predictions? The answer is that He could not confront them with this truth until they had clearly recognized Him as the Messiah.

But when they did so, at Caesarea Philippi, He needed to correct their misconceptions about the role the Messiah would play. They, along with all other Jews, expected the Messiah to set up a political kingdom, expel the Roman rulers, and thus deliver the nation from foreign oppression. John tells us that when Jesus had fed the five thousand the people wanted to "make him king by force" (John 6:15). What did He do? He sent His disciples away—perhaps they also were catching the revolutionary spirit—and He went alone to a quiet place in the hills to pray.

So Jesus' main concern now was to reveal to His disciples the true concept of the Messiah as a suffering Savior, the Suffering Servant of the Lord of Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. He had not come to earth to set up a political kingdom but to give Himself as a sacrifice for sin, that His spiritual kingdom might come in the hearts of people.

It is significant that all three predictions of the passion end with the promise of a resurrection. This was also necessary to our salvation.

#### B. A Natural Reaction: v. 22

Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. What he first said to Him is difficult to translate. Literally the

Greek says: "Merciful (or, gracious) to you." Arndt and Gingrich suggest, "*May God be gracious to you, Lord, that is, may God in his mercy spare you this*" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 376). This is evidently the general idea, and it fits with the second part: "This shall never happen to you!"

### C. A Firm Rebuke: v. 23

The words of Jesus here are startling. Adam Clarke comments: "'Get behind me, you adversary.' This is the proper translation of the Hebrew word *Satan*, from which the Greek word is taken. Our blessed Lord certainly never designed that *jn*en should believe He called Peter 'devil' because he, through erring affection, had wished Him to avoid that death which He predicted to himself. This translation, which is literal, takes away that harshness which before appeared in our Lord's words" (*Commentary*, p. 803).

## III. PATTERN OF CHRIST:

### Matthew 16:24-26

#### A. The Way of the Cross: v. 24

This verse spells out the cost of discipleship. Three things are involved: (1) deny himself; (2) take up his cross; (3) follow me. The first two are in the aorist tense, suggesting crucial decisions. The third is in the present tense of continuous action: We must keep on following Jesus all our lives.

The first step is self-denial, the renouncing of self, putting Christ in the place that self has held in dominating our life. "Take up his cross" means death to self, being crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), the full surrender of one's own will to the will of God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged at thirty-nine years of age in a Nazi concentration camp (April 9, 1945), wrote these meaningful words: "Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his

Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross" (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 77).

#### B. Losing to Find: v. 25

This verse sounds a recurring emphasis in Jesus' teaching. We find it in all four Gospels (Matt. 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25). If we hold on to our lives for selfish advantage, we lose them eternally. But if we lose them in loving service to others, we find them in a larger life here and hereafter.

#### C. The Value of the Soul: v. 26

"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

The logic of these questions is obvious to any thoughtful, observant person. Suppose one could get possession of all the material wealth of the entire world—what good would it do him? He cannot take one penny of it with him at death. Actually, those who live for self and for this world show very poor judgment.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we *know* that Jesus is the Son of God?
2. What is the importance of knowing this?
3. Why was the crucifixion necessary?
4. What is the importance of the resurrection?
5. How can we lose our life for Christ?
6. Why is the soul so valuable?

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Jesus indicated that the first step into the kingdom of God is self-denial. Self-assertion closes the door.

The oldest Christian church in the world is the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Built over the traditional site of the manger, it was erected in the fourth century. In its tower, bells ring out every Christmas to the delight of thousands of people.

One would expect the main entrance

to this large stone church to be a massive doorway. It once was, as one can readily see. But in the Middle Ages the Turks used to ride in on horseback and kill the worshipers.

Now the doorway is only about four feet high and very narrow. Almost everyone has to stoop low to get in. They call it the "Door of Humiliation." It is a symbol of entrance into the kingdom.

February 22, 1981

## LOVE ONE ANOTHER

DEVOTIONAL READING	I Corinthians 1:26—2:5
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Love One Another</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Love One Another</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 18</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 18:1-6, 15-22</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.</i> Matthew 18:4</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>Loving One Another</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 18</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 18:12-13, 21-35</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>If God so loved us, we ought to love one another.</i> I John 4:11</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>Feb. 16 M.: Who Is Greatest? Matt. 18:1-6</p> <p>Feb. 17 T.: The Terrible Responsibility. Matt. 18:7-11</p> <p>Feb. 18 W.: Not One Shall Perish. Matt. 18:12-17</p> <p>Feb. 19 T.: The Power of the Fellowship. Matt. 18:18-22</p> <p>Feb. 20 F.: How to Forgive. Matt. 18:23-35</p> <p>Feb. 21 S.: Thanks for Your Partnership. Phil. 1:3-11</p> <p>Feb. 22 S.: Faith by the Power of God. I Cor. 1:26—2:5</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us realize that genuine, holy love is the most important thing in the world.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> A.D. 29</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Galilee</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Love One Another</b></p> <p><b>I. Supreme Importance of Humility:</b> Matthew 18:1-5</p> <p>A. The Disciples' Question: v. 1</p> <p>B. The Concrete Answer: v. 2</p> <p>C. The Requirement of Childlikeness: v. 3</p> <p>D. The Specific Answer: v. 4</p> <p>E. Attitude Toward Children: v. 5</p> <p><b>II. The Seriousness of Causing to Sin:</b> Matthew 18:6-9</p> <p>A. Causing a Little One to Sin: v. 6</p> <p>B. Woe to the Guilty One: v. 7</p> <p>C. Drastic Action Required: vv. 8-9</p>



**III. Parable of the Lost Sheep:** Matthew 18:10-14**IV. Dealing with a Sinning Brother:** Matthew 18:15-17

- A. A Private Conference: v. 15
- B. One or Two Witnesses: v. 16
- C. Telling the Church: v. 17

**V. The Authority of the Fellowship:** Matthew 18:18-20

- A. Binding and Loosing: v. 18
- B. The Power of United Prayer: v. 19
- C. Christ's Presence in the Fellowship: v. 20

**VI. Unlimited Forgiveness:** vv. 21-22

Last Sunday's complete lesson covered chapters 16 and 17 of Matthew, but we could only deal with the first of these. So today we want to fill in the gap between lessons by looking at chapter 17 as well as 18.

The main incident in chapter 17 is the transfiguration (vv. 1-8). This is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels (see Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36).

A week after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John. He led them up a high mountain—probably one of the spurs of lofty Mount Hermon, which is near Caesarea Philippi. There He was "transfigured" before them. The Greek verb is *metamorphoo*, the noun form of which we have taken over into English as "metamorphosis." In the case of Jesus, "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light" (v. 2).

Then a voice from heaven declared, "This is my Son, whom I love" (v. 5). The transfiguration certified to the disciples that Peter's confession of Jesus' deity was entirely correct.

The second incident, the healing of an epileptic boy (vv. 14-18), took place at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration as soon as the group of four came down the hill. Then we have the miracle of Peter catching a fish with a coin in its mouth, with which he paid the annual temple tax for Jesus and himself. This shows how poor Jesus was.

Humility is not the most popular virtue in our world, but Jesus said that it is the most important one. He declared that unless we humble ourselves like children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven and that whoever does so humble himself is the greatest in the kingdom.

The other virtue that Jesus stressed most strongly is "Love One Another." Humility and love go together, just as pride and envy go together. Let's be sure that our lives are governed by the former, not the latter.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Loving one another is our greatest responsibility.
2. We should love others because God has so wonderfully loved us.
3. It is only His love in our hearts that can cause us to love others.
4. True love will help us to forgive others when they wrong us.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY:

Matthew 18:1-5

#### A. The Disciples' Question: v. 1

We do not know why, but the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Perhaps they were already wondering who was going to have the highest position in the coming Messianic kingdom. We know that this problem actually came to a head soon after this (20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45).

Adam Clarke probably has the right assessment of the situation when he writes: "Could these disciples have viewed the kingdom of Christ in any other light than that of a temporal one? Hence they wished to know whom He would make His prime minister—whom His general—whom His chief chancellor—whom supreme judge. The disciples having lately seen the keys delivered to Peter, and found that he, with James and John, had been privileged with being present at the Transfiguration, it is no wonder if a measure of jealousy and suspicion began to work in their minds. From this inquiry we may also learn that the disciples had no notion of Peter's supremacy" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 805).

#### B. The Concrete Answer: v. 2

Mark's Gospel clearly indicates that the above interpretation is correct. When Jesus arrived back in Capernaum after the transfiguration and the heal-

ing of the epileptic boy He asked His disciples: "What were you arguing about on the road?" (Mark 9:33). "But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest" (v. 34). It was then that Jesus took a little child as an object lesson. Characteristically Mark adds: "Taking him in his arms" (v. 36). Then we find the parallel to the saying here in Matthew in verse 5.

#### C. The Requirement of Childlikeness: v. 3

Note that we do not say "childishness." There is a world of difference between childishness and childlikeness, though some people seem to confuse the two.

"Except ye be converted" (KJV) is an overtranslation, when taken in the contemporary sense of being saved. The Greek simply says: "Unless you turn" or "unless you change" (NIV).

What change is meant? Jesus indicates it by adding: "and become like little children." It is after this change of attitude that one may "enter the kingdom of heaven"—that is, be saved.

What does it mean to "become like little children"? Adam Clarke puts it well: "Be as truly without worldly ambition, and the lust of power, as little children are, who act among themselves as if all were equal" (*Commentary*, p. 805).

#### D. The Specific Answer: v. 4

Now Jesus spelled it out. "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this

child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Humility is of the very essence of true greatness in God's sight.

This, of course, goes exactly counter to the philosophy of the world. The greatest person is the wealthiest person, the most powerful person, the one who can wield the greatest influence and enjoy the greatest popularity.

The Greek verb for "humbles" is *tapeinoo*. It comes from the adjective *tapeinos*, which literally meant "low" and then figuratively "of low position, poor, lowly, undistinguished," even "abject" (W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 811). But Jesus took this term that expressed contempt among the Greek intellectuals, and used it to describe the highest virtue in Christianity. If we are going to be true Christians, we must accept His assessment, not that of the world.

It should be remembered that humility is not a matter of striking a pious pose and trying to appear humble. This is actually one of the most pitiful manifestations of pride, and amounts to hypocrisy.

What is humility, then? It is honest self-appraisal, realizing our own limitations. It is an attitude of complete dependence on God, of trust in Him rather than on oneself. It is simply recognizing that we are not adequate of ourselves; we need divine help.

#### E. Attitude Toward Children: v. 5

"And whoever welcomes [the Greek verb is stronger than "shall receive" (KJV)] a little child like this in my name welcomes me." This statement shows Jesus' great love for children.

Unfortunately, His disciples did not share this spirit. In Mark 10:13-14 we read: "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant."

One of the signs of true greatness in a man is love of children and appreciation for women. The opposite proves a man is not great.

## II. THE SERIOUSNESS OF CAUSING TO SIN:

Matthew 18:6-9

### A. Causing a Little One to Sin: v. 6

What is meant in this verse by "little ones"? Some say it means little children. Others say it means new converts. Which is it?

My philosophy is *both and*. The foregoing reference to calling a little child (v. 2) would seem to indicate clearly that in verses 3-5 Jesus is talking about young children. Then why not in verse 6? At the same time, it may well be that He had new converts in mind also. "Little ones who believe in me" might suggest that—but not that *alone*.

The verb in the first clause of this verse is difficult to translate. For instance, we find "offend" (KJV), "causes... to stumble" (NASB), "causes... to sin" (NIV).

The Greek verb is *scandalizo*, which we have encountered before. The noun *scandalon* occurs three times in verse 7. Again we have "offences" (KJV), "stumbling blocks" (NASB), "things that cause people to sin" (NIV). The noun occurs fifteen times in the New Testament and is translated five different ways in the King James Version.

The noun *scandalon*, which we have taken over into English as *scandal*, first meant the bait-stick of a trap, and then the trap itself. Arndt and Gingrich suggest for this passage (v. 7): "temptation to sin" (p. 760). That seems to be the correct idea for the verb they give: "cause to sin."

Jesus treated this as a very serious matter. He said regarding the person who caused someone to sin: "It would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea." The Greek for "millstone" (KJV) is two words—literally, "a millstone of a donkey," that is, a millstone turned by a donkey. So it is helpful to say "large millstone" (NIV). Jesus used strong words here about those who cause people to sin.



### B. Woe to the Guilty One: v. 7

When Jesus says "Woe," He means it! The one who causes others to sin places himself under the judgment of God, and his punishment will be severe. The world also suffers woe because of this, but the guilty offender will suffer the most seriously.

### C. Drastic Action Required: vv. 8-9

From those who cause people to sin, Jesus now turns His attention to things in the Christian's life that might tempt him and cause him to fall. This is also important to consider.

Again, the language here is strong: "If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. . . . And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away." It is better to go through life maimed or crippled than to have a complete body and yet be lost in "hell" (Greek, *Gehenna*, the place of eternal punishment.)

What did Jesus mean? Unfortunately, a few people in the early church took Jesus' words literally and mutilated themselves.

One of the best interpretations and applications that I have heard of this passage was given to me many years ago by a pullman porter. He said, "I think it means that if you have a friend that is as close to you as your right hand and he is tempting you to do wrong, you must cut off that friendship right away." The same thing applies to vocations or avocations that may prove a source of temptation to us.

### III. PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP:

Matthew 18:10-14

This parable is found also in Luke 15:4-7, in another setting. It could very well be called the parable of the seeking shepherd, for the main point is the sacrificial, searching love of the shepherd for just one sheep that had gone astray.

"The Oriental shepherd knew all his

sheep and knew them by name. To lose one was almost like losing his own child. The picture of the shepherd going to the mountains, where the sheep had grazed during the day, to seek the lost one is a parable of Jesus' search for the lost sheep of the human race on the mountains of His earthly ministry—Temptation, Transfiguration, Gethsemane, Calvary" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 81).

But it also carries an important lesson for all of us. If Jesus cares for each lost sinner, so should we. We should try to find that one lost soul He wants us to seek out.

### IV. DEALING WITH A SINNING BROTHER:

Matthew 18:15-17

#### A. A Private Conference: v. 15

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." Probably this command has been disobeyed by church members as badly as any teaching of our Lord. Instead of going alone to the offender, most people tell others about the matter and never try to do what Jesus said we should.

Someone will say, "I just can't do it. I'm so deeply hurt, I couldn't face that person who wronged me. And if I did I would lose my temper."

What is the solution? As in the case of most problems, we believe that prayer is the answer. If we will honestly, humbly go before the Lord, He will, by His Spirit, fill our hearts with love for that person. Then we can go in a spirit of love. In many, if not most cases, this will disarm the offender and bring reconciliation.

#### B. One or Two Witnesses: v. 16

If the offender refuses to listen to the offended one's plea, there is a clear second step. Jesus said to "take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of



two or three witnesses.” The latter part is a quotation from Deuteronomy 19:15.

The wisdom of this injunction is obvious. Either party might mistakenly or purposely misquote what the other said, and so add fuel to the flames. But if two or three witnesses were there it would have a twofold result. In the first place, both parties would be more careful about what they said, which would help matters considerably. In the second place, if one accused the other of saying something offensive, the witnesses could testify as to exactly what was said. That would ensure justice in dealing with the situation and help the whole matter to be settled properly.

### C. Telling the Church: v. 17

“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” The first clause of this verse suggests that the witnesses were to act also as arbitrators.

Telling it to the church was to be the last, not the first action. Only a stubborn, unreasonable person would refuse to cooperate with the first two steps and so would need to be taken before the whole congregation for discipline. The one who refused to listen to the injunc-

tion of the church thereby took himself out of the Christian fellowship.

The word *church* (Greek, *ecclesia*) occurs 109 times in the New Testament (62 times in Paul's Epistles). But it is found only three times in the total four Gospels, and those are all in Matthew (twice here and once in 16:18). In 16:18 it refers to the general church of Jesus Christ, which He declared He would build. Here it indicates a local congregation. Paul uses it in both senses.

## V. THE AUTHORITY OF THE FELLOWSHIP: Matthew 18:18-20

### A. Binding and Loosing: v. 18

Here Jesus repeats what He had said to Peter (16:19), only He now applies it to the whole group of twelve apostles. “They were at the moment the *ecclesia*, the nucleus of the church that was to be after Pentecost. So in their hands lies the primitive discipline, just discussed (v. 17). The binding and loosing evidently refer to discipline and judgment in the early church” (*WBC*, IV, 82). We have already noted that to bind meant to forbid and to loose meant to permit, as used in the rabbinical writings of the Jews.

### B. The Power of United Prayer: v. 19

This verse appears to be a projection of the thought of verse 18. “A compact between two earnest, sincere individuals praying in the will of God in a sense binds God to answer their request. This paradox is holy ground and requires a delicate balance of thought between divine sovereignty and human freedom. But the statement here is clear and emphatic” (*WBC*, IV, 82).

The Greek verb translated “agree” is *symphoneo*, (literally, “sound together”) which gives us our word *symphony*. Adam Clarke observes, “It is a metaphor taken from a number of musical instruments set to the same key and playing the same tune. Here it means a

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be childlike?
2. Why was Jesus concerned about children?
3. What are some ways in which we may cause children or new converts to sin?
4. How often is Jesus' prescription in verses 15-17 followed?
5. What does it mean for two to agree in prayer?
6. What can enable us to forgive without limit?

perfect agreement of the hearts, desires, wishes, and voices of two or more persons praying to God" (*Commentary*, p. 806). It is more than just agreeing on the exact wording of a common prayer; it is a harmony of spirit.

### C. Christ's Presence in the Fellowship: v. 20

"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." With numberless thousands of gatherings for worship and prayer going on at the same time, how can this be?

The answer is that Christ is both infinite and omnipresent. He is not limited by time and space, as we are. Because He is pure spirit He can be everywhere all the time. But He is personally, particularly, and very graciously present wherever even two or three gather to pray. We should always remember that He is there!

### VI. UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS: vv. 21-22

Peter was always very practical. He was evidently still thinking about what

Jesus had said in verse 15: If a brother who sins against you repents, you are to forgive him. Still bothered about this, Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus' reply was shattering: "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." The rabbinical rule was three times and no more. Peter was willing to stretch it to seven times. But Jesus wouldn't let him stop there.

Why is "seventy times seven" (KJV) changed to "seventy-seven times" (NIV)? The answer is that the one long Greek word for this whole expression (found only here in the New Testament) occurs in the Septuagint of Genesis 4:24, where we read:

If Cain is avenged seven times,  
then Lamech seventy-seven  
times."

Arndt and Gingrich (*Lexicon*, p. 212) and other good scholars prefer that here. In either case it means forgiveness without limit, not counting the number of times.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Many years ago a young lady who was in charge of the children's work in a large church told me a sad story. An evangelist was beginning a revival meeting on a Sunday morning. The young lady and her associates were eager to have the children see and hear him. So they marched the children up from the basement, where they usually had junior church, and seated them in the front pews that had been reserved for them.

When the evangelist saw the children come in, he said to the pastor: "I can't preach with those children sitting there. They will make too much disturbance." So the pastor had to ask them to leave.

The young lady recounted her difficulty in trying to explain to the children why they weren't wanted. What a travesty on Christianity!



## **THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW (CONT.)**

**Unit IV: Affirmations of the Kingdom**

**Unit V: Through Suffering to Victory**





March 1, 1981

## RELATIONSHIPS IN THE KINGDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING	Deuteronomy 30:15-20
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Dignity of Persons</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>You and Family Relationship</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 19</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 19:1-15</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.</i> Matthew 19:26</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>Jesus' Love for Children</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 19:1-30</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 19:1b, 2, 13-15</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>"Let the children come to me . . . for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."</i> Matthew 19:14</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>Feb. 23 M.: Those Whom God Has Joined Together. Matt. 19:1-12</p> <p>Feb. 24 T.: Putting Christ First. Matt. 19:13-22</p> <p>Feb. 25 W.: Forsaking All to Follow Jesus. Matt. 19:23-30</p> <p>Feb. 26 T.: Living Together as Christians. Rom. 12:9-21</p> <p>Feb. 27 F.: Transformed Relationships. Col. 3:18-24</p> <p>Feb. 28 S.: The Unity of the Spirit. Eph. 4:1-6</p> <p>Mar. 1 S.: Obedience to the Commandments. Deut. 30:15-20</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us realize the solemn responsibility of keeping the marriage vow.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> A.D. 29</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Transjordan</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Relationships in the Kingdom</b></p> <p><b>I. The Matter of Divorce:</b> Matthew 19:1-9</p> <p>A. The Setting: vv. 1-2</p> <p>B. The Question: v. 3</p> <p>C. The Divine Plan: vv. 4-5</p> <p>D. The Permanence of Marriage: v. 6</p> <p>E. The Counter Question: v. 7</p>

- F. The Explanation: v. 8
- G. The Only Condition for Divorce: v. 9

**II. The Matter of Marriage: Matthew 19:10-12**

- A. Reaction of the Disciples: v. 10
- B. Conditions of Nonmarriage: vv. 11-12

**III. Attitudes Toward Children: Matthew 19:13-15**

- A. Attitude of the Disciples: v. 13
- B. Attitude of Jesus: vv. 14-15

**IV. The Rich Young Ruler: Matthew 19:16-22**

**V. The Danger of Riches: Matthew 19:23-26**

**VI. Rewards in the Kingdom: Matthew 19:27-30**

- A. Peter's Question: v. 27
- B. Jesus' Answer: vv. 28-30

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

The first nine lessons of this quarter will be devoted to completing our study of the Gospel of Matthew. The last five lessons will be based on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Today we begin our study of Unit IV: "Affirmations of the Kingdom" (covering Matthew 19-25). The first lesson treats the kingdom affirmation concerning marriage and divorce.

The adult topic for today is "Dignity of Persons." This is relevant to the general subject "Relationships in the Kingdom." Two relationships are discussed in this lesson: the marriage relationship and our relationship to children. In both cases a proper respect for the dignity of persons will solve most problems. Husbands and wives who have that respect will not be untrue to each other. And children should be treated as persons, not things.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

Our lesson today is "You and Family Relationship," the first and the most important relationship, outside our relationship to God.

Young people are apt to chafe under the restrictions of the family and give greater attention to other relationships, but too often they pay a high price in suffering for doing so. We should cherish our home and get the best from it.

Older teens have to think of the question of a new relationship—marriage. If entered into, this will take priority over the previous one. But Christ must come first in both.

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. "Jesus loves the little children of the world."
2. We should sing that with grateful hearts.
3. We should also show our love to other children.
4. We should recognize and appreciate our place in the family.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE MATTER OF DIVORCE:

Matthew 19:1-9

#### A. The Setting: vv. 1-2

"When Jesus had finished saying these things [His teaching in chapter 18, which we studied last week], he left Galilee [probably for the last time] and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan" (v. 1). This is the area known in that day as Perea—from the Greek preposition *peran*, "across," here translated "the other side of" (that is, the east side of the Jordan River). In modern times it has been called Transjordan. Today it is the Jordan Kingdom, usually referred to simply as Jordan.

As the Greek name Perea suggests, there were many non-Jews living there in Jesus' day. But just before His final brief ministry in Judea, culminating in His crucifixion, Jesus spent perhaps three months in Perea.

Here we find the same pattern as in His great Galilean ministry: "Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there" (v. 2). But along with that He was constantly teaching, as we see in chapters 19 and 20 (see also Mark 10:1).

#### B. The Question: v. 3

"Some Pharisees came to him to test him." As we learn from other places in the Gospels, they were trying to trap Him in His talk and bring charges against Him.

This time they posed the question: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" The parallel in Mark (10:2) simply has the question: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Why does Matthew add "for every cause"?

Matthew was writing for Jews, and they were all familiar with the debate going on at that time between the rabbinical schools of Hillel and Shammai.

The dispute revolved around the interpretation of a clause in Deuteronomy 24:1—"because he finds something indecent about her." Shammai held that this referred to uncleanness or adultery. But Hillel was much more liberal. He would allow a man to divorce his wife if she did anything he disliked—for instance, if she burned his food when cooking it.

#### C. The Divine Plan: vv. 4-5

In reply Jesus asked, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'?" These Pharisees prided themselves on being thoroughly familiar with their sacred Scriptures (our Old Testament), so Jesus called their attention to Genesis 1:27. Human beings at the very beginning were created as "male and female," and any effort to change this today is an insult to God.

Jesus went on to indicate (v. 5) that the Creator declared at that time, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Three things are emphasized in this verse. The first is that a man is to "leave"—a strong verb in the Greek meaning "leave behind"—his father and mother. One of the causes of broken marriages is that some husbands—and wives—do not really leave their parents. When the parents still take first place, there is bound to be trouble in the new marriage.

The second verb, "be united" is also a strong word in Greek—literally, "be glued." In these days of easy, frequent divorce we may well pray, "Lord, give us more glue in the modern marriage."

The last clause of verse 5, "and the two will become one flesh," indicates that there is to be a physical, as well as social, union. "That is what makes marriage sacred, something different from



any other contract or association in life. It is for this reason that true marriage is unbreakable" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 84).

#### D. The Permanence of Marriage: v. 6

The first part of verse 6 reinforces the last part of verse 5. The husband and wife "are no longer two, but one." This has tremendous implications for a happy marriage. The more the newlyweds can be united in desires and purposes, and even in likes and dislikes, the more harmony there will be in the home.

It is obvious that this underscores the need for a Christian to marry a Christian. Even then there must be a constant seeking for closer unity of interests.

Then Jesus issued a warning that is incorporated in most wedding ceremonies: "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." The Greek verb for "has joined together" literally means "has yoked together." The picture is that of two oxen wearing the same yoke. This means that they must pull together equally, in order to function properly. Adam Clarke notes, "Among the ancients, when persons were newly married, they put a yoke upon their necks . . . to show that they were to be one, closely united, and pulling equally together in all the concerns of life" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 807).

The prohibition that Jesus stated here shows that a legal divorce is not necessarily acceptable in God's sight. As Christians we need to realize that we are subject primarily to God's laws and secondarily to man's regulations. Very often the divine requirements are higher than the human.

#### E. The Counter Question: v. 7

The Pharisees were not yet through with Jesus. They countered with this question: "Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certifi-

cate of divorce and send her away?" If God is so opposed to divorce, why did Moses permit it? They were referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

"It should be recognized that Moses was not hereby encouraging divorce. The opposite was the case: he was putting restrictions on it to prevent easy divorce. The Moslem today needs only to say to his wife three times, 'I divorce thee,' and it is legally done. Moses insisted that a man must seek out a scribe and have legal papers drawn up. This would tend to discourage divorce" (*WBC*, IV, 84).

#### F. The Explanation: v. 8

In answer to the Pharisees' question, Jesus explained: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." This was not God's original plan.

#### G. The Only Condition for Divorce: v. 9

"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." Today "fornication" (KJV) is a term used mainly in relation to unmarried people. So "marital unfaithfulness" (NIV) is a more accurate translation.

Since a man and woman when married become "one flesh" (v. 5), marital unfaithfulness on the part of either one breaks the marriage union. That is why the innocent party is free to remarry.

The idea that adultery is a sin has almost disappeared in modern society. More than that, it no longer has legal significance. A Christian lawyer confirmed my suspicion that adultery is practically never offered today as a cause for divorce.

The Pharisees had asked Jesus if it was "lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason" (v. 5). Now Jesus has given His answer: "No, only for adultery." In this He agreed with Shammai.

## II. THE MATTER OF MARRIAGE:

### A. Reaction of the Disciples:

v. 10

A bit shaken by Jesus' rigid requirement, the disciples said to Him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." They didn't want to get stuck for life with some wife they got tired of! The safest way was not to get married at all! As Adam Clarke remarks, this was a flat contradiction to God's attitude (Gen. 2:18). These disciples clearly needed to come a long way in their spiritual apprehension. They were selfish in spirit, thinking only of their own interests and comfort.

### B. Conditions of Nonmarriage:

vv. 11-12

"Jesus picked up their callous, crude remark and lifted the idea to a higher level. For some, celibacy was the better way, but only for those who could receive this state properly (v. 11)" (*WBC*, IV, 84). Enforced celibacy is contrary to the Bible. It is a choice that one should make only after careful prayer.

In verse 12 we find the noun "eunuchs" (Greek, *eunouchoi*) three times and the verb *eunouchizo* ("made eunuchs") twice. Jesus indicated that there are three kinds of eunuchs. The first group consisted of those who were with a birth defect. The second was composed of those who were "eunuchized" by men. The reason for this action is clear when we know the background. A. B. Bruce notes, originally a eunuch was "keeper of the bedchamber in any Oriental harem . . . , a jealous office, which could be entrusted only to such as were . . . emasculated" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, I, 247).

The third class of eunuchs consisted of those who "have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven." This is in line with what Paul says in I Corinthians 7:32-35. While "eunuchized themselves" (literal Greek) might refer to a self-imposed physical operation, it

seems more natural to take this as meaning a decision not to marry—that is, self-chosen celibacy.

## III. ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN:

Matthew 19:13-15

### A. Attitude of the Disciples: v. 13

"Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them."

It was the custom among the Jews to lay hands on the heads of children and pray for them, much as we do today when infants are dedicated to the Lord in church. So it was very natural for parents to bring their little children to Jesus to have Him "place his hands on them and pray for them." Jesus had a gentle, loving spirit that made it easy for parents to do this, and we know that children weren't afraid of Him, for He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:16).

It is essential that all Christian workers have a genuine love for children and are kind to them. I sometimes wonder how many today still turn children away from Jesus, as the disciples did on this occasion.

### B. Attitude of Jesus: vv. 14-15

In contrast to the disciples' bad attitude, Jesus said: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (v. 14). The Greek literally says, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." This could be interpreted two ways: (1) The kingdom of heaven "belongs to such as these" (NIV), or (2) the kingdom of heaven is composed of such as these. Actually, both are true. Jesus said that you have to be like a little child to get into the kingdom (18:3). But it is also true that innocent little children, who have not yet reached the age of accountability, make up a considerable segment of the

kingdom. As we found last week, only the *childlike* can have a place in the kingdom. We should welcome children, as Jesus did, and show them our love.

The Master proceeded to lay His hands on the children that were brought to Him. Then He went on to His next assignment (v. 15).

#### IV. THE RICH YOUNG RULER:

Matthew 19:16-22

This incident is found in all three synoptic Gospels (see Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). It is by putting the three accounts together that we get our threefold title: Rich Young Ruler. All three accounts say that he was rich. Matthew (v. 20) says that he was young, and Luke (18:18) that he was a ruler.

The young man asked Jesus what "good thing" he could do to inherit eternal life (v. 16). Jesus told him to obey the commandments (v. 17). When the man asked, "Which ones?" (v. 18), the Master cited the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and fifth of the Ten Commandments, adding the great commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," which sums up the last six commandments—man's duties to his fellowmen.

The man replied that he had kept all these (v. 20), and asked, "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and

give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (v. 21).

Unfortunately, the man failed this test. He thereby proved that he had not kept the first commandment, for he loved money more than God.

#### V. THE DANGER OF RICHES:

Matthew 19:23-26

Jesus proceeded to make the lesson clear to His disciples (v. 23). He declared that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 24).

The disciples were astonished at this, because they had always been taught that material prosperity was a sign and proof of divine blessing. Perplexed, they asked, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 25).

Jesus' answer was "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (v. 26). Adam Clarke comments: "God alone can take the love of the world out of the human heart. Therefore the salvation of the rich is represented as possible only to Him" (*Commentary*, p. 808).

Some people think that a rich man cannot be a Christian. They quote the Bible as saying that "money is the root of all evil." What the Bible does say, however, is that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." The young ruler loved his money, and that kept him out of the kingdom.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is divorce increasing so rapidly today?
2. What can be done to halt the trend?
3. What example should the church set?
4. Why are so many church members getting divorced?
5. How should the church deal with this?
6. What part does Bible study have in this?

#### VI. REWARDS IN THE KINGDOM:

Matthew 19:27-30

##### A. Peter's Question: v. 27

Too much of the time Peter thought on low levels, and this was one of those times. He said to Jesus, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" In other words, "What are we going to get out of it?" The question was completely selfish, and was a sad commentary indeed on how little Peter had imbibed the spirit of his Master.

**B. Jesus' Answer: vv. 28-30**

Mercifully Jesus passed by all this evident self-centeredness and graciously assured His twelve apostles that when He sat on His glorious throne they would "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (v. 28). And He reached out to include us:

"Everyone who has left . . . for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (v. 29).

Then He added, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (v. 30). This was perhaps a rebuke to Peter's desire for the highest place, and a call to humility.

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**CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

Divorce is one of the greatest single problems in American society today. The family is the mainstay of civilization. If our families fall apart, our country will finally go to ruin.

Unfortunately this is happening fast in the United States. Just this week I read this news item: "Some 45 percent of children born last year in the United

States may live part of their childhood with only one parent because of the rising divorce rate (*Herald of Holiness*, May 1, 1979, p. 30). What chance do these children have to develop into strong, moral adults? If ever this country needed a new impact of the Bible, it is right now.



March 8, 1981

## GOD'S GENEROSITY

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Leviticus 20:22-26

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God's Generosity*

**Youth Topic:** *God Is Generous*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 20:1-34

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 20:1-16

**Memory Verse:** *The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Matthew 20:28

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Jesus' Concern for Everyone*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 20:1-34

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 20:29-34

**Memory Verse:** *Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.* Matthew 20:26

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Mar. 2 M.:** Laborers in the Kingdom. Matt. 20:1-16

**Mar. 3 T.:** Greatness in the Kingdom. Matt. 20:17-28

**Mar. 4 W.:** God's Love in Our Hearts. Rom. 5:1-5

**Mar. 5 T.:** Reconciliation Through Christ. Rom. 5:6-11

**Mar. 6 F.:** The Free Gift. Rom. 5:12-21

**Mar. 7 S.:** God's Gift to Believers. John 1:9-13

**Mar. 8 S.:** A Separated People. Lev. 20:22-26

LESSON AIM

To show that God is generous, and we also should be.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** A.D. 30

**Place:** Perea

LESSON OUTLINE

**God's Generosity**

**I. Hiring Workers for the Vineyard:** Matthew 20:1-7

A. Early in the Morning: vv. 1-2

B. The Third Hour: vv. 3-4

C. The Sixth and Ninth Hour: v. 5

D. The Eleventh Hour: vv. 6-7

**II. Paying the Workers:** Matthew 20:8-12

A. Instructions to the Foreman: v. 8

B. The Eleventh-hour Men: v. 9

C. The All-day Workers: v. 10

D. Grumbling: vv. 11-12

**III. Defending a Policy: Matthew 20:13-16**

- A. Honoring Agreement: v. 13
- B. Showing Generosity: vv. 14-15
- C. A General Principle: v. 16

**IV. Third Prediction of the Passion: Matthew 20:17-19****V. An Ambitious Mother's Request: Matthew 20:20-28**

- A. The Request: vv. 20-21
- B. The Reproof: v. 22
- C. The Rejection: v. 23
- D. The Lesson: vv. 24-28

**VI. Healing Two Blind Men: Matthew 20:29-34**

Today's Scripture lesson is the parable of the workers in the vineyard, which is found only in Matthew's Gospel. It is an expansion of the proverb found in the closing verse of the previous chapter: "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." Jesus illustrated this rather surprising truth by giving a concrete example. In the parable we shall find that those hired last were paid first.

Every successful speaker realizes that listeners are apt to forget a single-sentence statement, but few people forget an interesting story. That is why Jesus spoke in parables so much of the time. He wanted His listeners to get the point and remember.

A preacher speaking to a congregation some years after his previous visit used a different sermon but the same closing illustration. Some people said they remembered hearing that sermon the time before. Probably if he had used the same sermon both times, but with a different illustration, they would have said they never heard it before!

Every honest, thoughtful person would have to agree that God is generous. He showers us daily with innumerable blessings. Even when we tend to forget Him, He never forgets us. If His benefits to us were measured by our gratitude, or lack of it, most of us would fare very poorly.

Because God is generous to us, we should be generous to others. Instead of being envious when others get special honor, or seem to be favored more than we are, we should be happy for them. This is the Christlike spirit, and the Holy Spirit can help us show a generous attitude at such times.

Envy is a green-eyed monster that will devour us if we give it any place in our lives. Let's ask the Lord to deliver us from it.

1. Jesus is concerned for everyone's welfare.
2. Whenever He saw a person in need of help He always felt compassion immediately.
3. We can help people who have need.
4. All of us should serve others.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. HIRING WORKERS FOR THE VINEYARD:

Matthew 20:1-7

#### A. Early in the Morning: vv. 1-2

As we noted in the Introduction, the parable of the workers in the vineyard is an illustration of the statement in the last verse of the previous chapter. It must always be remembered that the chapter divisions in our Bibles were made in fairly modern times. Originally there were no chapter or verse divisions at all. A large percentage of both actually hinder rather than help in the study of God's Word. They often divide what belongs together, as in this case. The use of paragraphs (as in the NIV) is a great aid to intelligent Bible study, yet we also must retain the traditional chapter and verse numbers for the purpose of citing passages.

This parable, as with most parables in Matthew, begins with the formula: "The kingdom of heaven is like." This time the kingdom is compared to "a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard" (v. 1). This was probably at six o'clock, soon after daybreak.

"He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard" (v. 2). The denarius was a Roman silver coin worth about twenty cents, but its buying power was much greater than that, as indicated by the fact that it was the regular day's wages. Henry Alford writes, "The *denarius a day* was the pay of a Roman soldier in Tiberius' time, a few years before this parable was uttered" (*The Greek Testament*, I, 201). "Penny" (KJV) is misleading to the modern reader. Our penny is a copper coin, but this was a silver coin.

#### B. The Third Hour: vv. 3-4

At nine o'clock in the morning the landowner went out again, because he

needed more workmen. Probably his grapes were ripe and must be picked immediately, before they spoiled.

He saw other men "standing in the marketplace doing nothing" (v. 3). They evidently were willing to work and were waiting for someone to hire them.

The Greek word for "marketplace" is *agora*. Every city in those days had its *agora*, just as most of the old cities in Europe still have a central plaza, where people gather to sit at tables or walk about. Some of these, as the Plaza Major in Salamanca, Spain, are striking in appearance and form an important part of city life. The Greeks and Romans had them in Jesus' day, as one can still see in many places.

To these men in the *agora* the landowner said, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." They would naturally expect three-quarters of a denarius for nine hours' work. But no particular amount was promised.

#### C. The Sixth and Ninth Hours: v. 5

At noon and three o'clock in the afternoon the owner went to the *agora* and hired more men. He "did the same thing"—that is, he did not state what their wages would be. They needed the money, and so they were willing to work for only a fraction of a denarius. This fact certainly counts in their favor. There is no indication of unwillingness or laziness on their part.

#### D. The Eleventh Hour: vv. 6-7

"About the eleventh hour"—five o'clock in the afternoon—the owner went out again. Rather obviously, he was becoming deeply concerned about his grapes.

Even at that late hour he "found still others standing around" (v. 6). He challenged them with the question: "Why

have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

Their answer was brief and right to the point: "Because no one has hired us" (v. 7). That they immediately took advantage of his offer shows that they were not lazy.

Again the owner said, "You also go and work in my vineyard" (cf. v. 4). Verse 12 shows that they responded promptly. They put in the hour that was left.

## II. PAYING THE WORKERS:

Matthew 20:8-12

### A. Instructions to the Foreman:

v. 8

"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'" We have already noted that this parable is a commentary on the last verse of the previous chapter. This begins to appear here, for the last to begin work are the first to be paid.

The Greek word for "foreman" means "manager, foreman, steward." A prosperous man would commission his servant to take care of such matters as this.

### B. The Eleventh-hour Men: v. 9

"The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius." This must have been a welcome surprise to them. They had no reason to expect a full day's wages for working one hour.

### C. The All-day Workers: v. 10

Finally the line of workmen reached the last segment, those who were hired early that morning. They, very naturally, expected that they would receive more. "But each one of them also received a denarius." It was a real disappointment.

## C. Grumbling: vv. 11-12

They "began to grumble against the landowner." He wasn't fair! "These men who were hired last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day." They felt fully justified in registering their complaint.

The Greek word for "grumble" here is the same one that is used in the Septuagint for the "murmuring" of the Israelites in the wilderness. It betrays a bad spirit of finding fault and complaining. We know that for the Israelites the consequences were disastrous: a whole generation missed the land of promise. It is a warning to all of us not to grumble when things don't go our way.

## III. DEFENDING A POLICY:

Matthew 20:13-16

### A. Honoring Agreement: v. 13

The landowner was evidently standing there as his foreman paid the men. When he heard the workers grumbling, he said to one of them: "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?" The owner had kept his agreement with the workers and they had no real basis for complaint.

### B. Showing Generosity: vv. 14-15

The owner said that it was his wish to "give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you" (v. 14). Then he added: "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (v. 15). If he wanted to be generous to a person in need, that was no reason for complaint. The owner exposed the real trouble in the grumbler's heart. It was envy, which always produces a bad attitude.

The owner justified his action as being fair to all. "The point is that those who had worked only one hour needed the denarius to supply food for their families just as much as those who had



labored all day. The implication is that they would have worked the full day had they had the opportunity" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 87).

George A. Buttrick expresses it this way: "Divine judgment . . . is according not alone to the measure of the work but also according to the measure of opportunity" (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 164).

### C. A General Principle: v. 16

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last." This is almost a repetition of the closing verse of the previous chapter (19:30) and so ties the parable in with what precedes. That is, Jesus is still answering Peter's question in 19:27.

R. C. Trench brings this out very well. He writes: "The question itself, 'What shall we have?' was not a right one; it put their relation to their Lord on a wrong footing; there was a tendency in it to bring their obedience to a calculation of so much work, so much reward. There lurked, too, a certain self-complacency in this speech. That spirit of self-exalting comparison of ourselves with others . . ." (*Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, p. 138).

Henry Alford gives a rather full treatment of the meaning of this parable. He says: "(1) Its salient point is that the Kingdom of God is of *grace*, not of debt; that *they who were called first, and have laboured longest, have no more claim upon God than those who were called last: but that to all, His covenant promise shall be fulfilled in its integrity.* (2) Its *primary application* is to the *Apostles*, who had asked the question. They were not to be of such a spirit, as to imagine, with the murmurers in ver. 11, that they should have something supereminent (because they were called first, and had laboured longest) above those who *in their own time* were to be afterward called (I Cor. xv. 8-11). (3) Its *secondary applications* are to all those to whom such a comparison, of *first and last called*, will apply: *nationally*, to the Jews, who

were first called, and with a *definite covenant*, and the Heathens who came in afterwards . . . *individually*, to those whose call has been in early life, and who have spent their days in God's active service, and those who have been summoned later; and to various other classes and persons between whom comparison, not only of *time*, but of advantages, talents, or any other distinguishing characteristic, can be made; that none of the first of these can boast themselves over the others, nor look for higher place and greater reward . . ." (*The Greek Testament*, I, 199).

## IV. THIRD PREDICTION OF THE PASSION:

Matthew 20:17-19

The first prediction is in 16:21-23, the second in 17:22-23. This third one is a bit more full. Jesus said that "the chief priests and teachers of the law"—the religious leaders of the nation—would "condemn him to death" and "turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified." This happened in the trials before Pilate, as well as before Herod Antipas. Then Jesus added, "On the third day he will be raised to life!" Significantly, this emphasis on His resurrection is found in all three predictions. The important new item here is that His death would not be by stoning, the Jewish method of capital punishment, but by Roman crucifixion.

We should note that this paragraph begins with the statement: "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them" (v. 17). The nearer He came to the climactic event of His ministry, the more time He spent with His disciples preparing them for that moment.

## V. AN AMBITIOUS MOTHER'S REQUEST:

Matthew 20:20-28

### A. The Request: vv. 20-21

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her son and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him" (v. 20).

When Jesus asked her what she wanted she replied, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom" (v. 21).

Mark (10:35) pictures James and John making the request. But there is no contradiction here, since Matthew says that the mother came "with her sons." Doubtless all three joined in asking for the special honor.

### B. The Reproof: v. 22

Jesus' answer was a bit stern: "You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" It was the "cup" that in Gethsemane He prayed to be delivered from—the separation from His Father as He took our place as a condemned criminal on the cross.

Blithely the two disciples answered, "We can." The King James wording, "We are able," has been made into a song that completely ignores the shallowness of their reply.

### C. The Rejection: v. 23

The Master assured His disciples that they would indeed drink from His cup of sorrow and suffering, in a measure in their persecution for the faith—James was the first apostolic martyr (Acts 12:2). However, He went on to say: "But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant" (v. 23). So He rejected their request.

### D. The Lesson: vv. 24-28

"When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers" (v. 24). They probably tried to appear very pious, but they had envy and ill will in their hearts.

Jesus took advantage of the situation to teach all twelve apostles a much needed lesson. First He said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them"—literal Greek—"and their high officials exercise authority over them" (v. 25). Then He added, "Not so with you" (v. 26). The one who

wants to be great must be your "servant," and the one who wants to be first must be your "slave." This is what the Greek says (see NIV). Then comes one of the greatest theological passages in the Gospels: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v. 28). Service, not self-seeking, should be our aim.

## VI. HEALING TWO BLIND MEN: Matthew 20:29-34

This incident took place near Jericho, close to the Jordan River, as Jesus was making His last, fateful journey to Jerusalem. In his parallel account, Mark (10:46) speaks only of blind Bartimaeus, and Luke simply says "a blind man" (18:35). But one of the characteristics of Matthew's Gospel is that he several times mentions two where the other Gospels have only one. This is probably because he, as a tax collector, was used to keeping exact figures. Mark and Luke mention only the prominent one of the two.

In this incident we have another example of the real spirit of the Master. We read in verse 34, "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes." The sequel is what it should be: "Immediately they received their sight and followed him."

The crowd had rebuked the blind men who called for help (v. 31), but Jesus "called them" (v. 32). What is our attitude? Do we welcome those in need and try to help them?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What should be our attitude toward deathbed conversions?
2. Do latecomers sometimes work harder?
3. What attitude do ambitious mothers need to take?
4. When did James and John get cured of their self-seeking ambition?
5. What is the path to true greatness?
6. How did Jesus set the example?

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

In relation to the parable of the workers in the vineyard we need to ask ourselves: "Do we have the generosity of God or the selfishness of the grumblers?" Many of us have spent years in dedicated service to the Lord. Are we envious of latecomers who seem

to get as much credit as we do?

It is such situations as this that really test and reveal our true spiritual state. It is easy to ride "high, wide, and handsome" in public, but then fail miserably in private. But God reads our hearts.

March 15, 1981

## QUESTIONS OF PRIORITY

DEVOTIONAL READING	Psalm 119:169-176
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Questions of Priority</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Putting God First</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 21:45—22:46 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 22:15-32 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.</i> Matthew 22:21
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Loving Our Neighbors</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 21:45—22:46 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Luke 10:29-37 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>You shall love your neighbor as yourself.</i> Matthew 22:39
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>Mar. 9 M.:</b> The Priority of Faith. Matt. 21:18-22 <b>Mar. 10 T.:</b> "By What Authority...?" Matt. 21:23-27 <b>Mar. 11 W.:</b> The Priority of Deeds Over Words. Matt. 21:28-32 <b>Mar. 12 T.:</b> The Stone the Builders Rejected. Matt. 21:33-44 <b>Mar. 13 F.:</b> Those Who Enter the Kingdom. Matt. 22:1-14 <b>Mar. 14 S.:</b> Render to God His Dues. Matt. 22:15-22 <b>Mar. 15 S.:</b> Sacrificing All for Christ. Phil. 3:7-11
LESSON AIM	To help us get our priorities straight.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> A.D. 30 <b>Place:</b> the temple courts in Jerusalem
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Questions of Priority</b> <b>I. Paying Taxes to Caesar:</b> Matthew 22:15-22 A. Attitude of the Pharisees: v. 15 B. Odd Association: v. 16a C. Deceptive Flattery: v. 16b D. Catchy Question: v. 17 E. Exposure of Hypocrisy: v. 18 F. The Tax Coin: v. 19 G. A Significant Question: v. 20



- H. Logical Consequence: v. 21
- I. Silenced Foes: v. 22

## II. Marriage at the Resurrection: Matthew 22:23-33

- A. Attitude of the Sadducees: v. 23
- B. A Preposterous Story: vv. 24-27
- C. A Loaded Question: v. 28
- D. Deserved Reproof: v. 29
- E. A Clear Answer: v. 30
- F. Proof of the Resurrection: vv. 31-32
- G. Astonishment of the Crowd: v. 33

## III. The Greatest Commandment: Matthew 22:34-40

- A. Question of the Lawyer: vv. 34-36
- B. The First Commandment: vv. 37-38
- C. The Second Commandment: vv. 39-40

### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

The background Scripture for this lesson begins with Matthew 21:45-46. Here we read: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew that he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet."

This gives us the setting for our lesson today. The chief priests were Sadducees. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the two main sects of Judaism in Jesus' day. The Pharisees controlled the Jewish synagogues throughout the world. The Sadducees had control of the temple at Jerusalem. They both realized that Jesus was condemning them. This was particularly true in the case of the parable of the two sons (21:28-32) and of the parable of the tenants (21:33-44). The point of each was obvious.

In anger and resentment the chief priests and Pharisees "looked for a way to arrest him." But the people were on Jesus' side, convinced that He was a prophet of God. So the religious leaders had to bide their time.

### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

The highest priority in life is captured well in the title of today's lesson: "Putting God First." If we do that all the time we will keep on the right track.

The religious leaders of Israel were "bugged" by the question of paying taxes to Caesar. They belonged to God, not to the Romans!

In reply Jesus told them that they had an obligation to support the government that ruled over them, much as we do today. We all have to pay our fair share of the bill for police and fire protection, for instance.

But Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to emphasize that we also have an obligation to God, and that is a prior responsibility, which must always be given first place.

### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. We are to love our neighbors.
2. A neighbor is anyone who needs our help.

3. Jesus was the great Good Samaritan.
4. He wants us, as His followers, to be good Samaritans today.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. PAYING TAXES TO CAESAR:

Matthew 22:15-22

#### A. Attitude of the Pharisees: v. 15

"Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words." The Greek verb for "trap" (only here in the New Testament) means "set a snare or trap." That is what the Pharisees were trying to do to catch Jesus.

This is a further projection of what we saw in 21:45-46 (see Introduction). Jesus was becoming altogether too popular with the crowds and posed a threat to the authority of the religious leaders. They had to "get Him" for it!

#### B. Odd Association: v. 16a

"They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians." The latter, as their name implies, were supporters of Roman rule. Herod the Great had been the Roman ruler of all Palestine (37-4 B.C.). His son, Herod Antipas, still ruled Galilee for the Romans.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were ardent nationalists. They hated Roman domination of their country. Ordinarily they were at sword points with the Herodians. But, as often happens with mutually antagonistic groups, they got together in their common opposition to Jesus.

#### C. Deceptive Flattery: v. 16b

The Pharisees prided themselves on being men of the highest moral and spiritual caliber, but here they stoop to altogether insincere flattery. If they knew that Jesus was "a man of integrity" who taught "the way of God in accordance with truth," why were they trying to arrest and kill Him?

The next sentence is sheer deception: "You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are." In saying this, they hoped to put Jesus off guard. If He didn't care what men, even government officials said, then He wouldn't be afraid to speak out against Roman taxation. The Pharisees were hoping that He would make some strong statement carelessly. Then they would spring the trap, and turn Him over to the Roman authorities for severe punishment or death.

#### D. Catchy Question: v. 17

Deferentially they asked for His opinion, as if they valued it highly: "Tell us then, what is your opinion?" Then they asked a brief, but "hot" question: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" The people in the provinces (including Palestine) had to pay the Roman emperor both poll taxes and property taxes.

"The questioners assumed that they had Jesus trapped. Whichever way He answered He would be caught on one of the two horns of a dilemma. If He said, 'No,' the Herodians would immediately report Him to the Romans as one who was guilty of sedition against the government. (Now it becomes evident why the Pharisees wanted Herodians along.) If He said, 'Yes,' the Pharisees would cry to the people: 'See, he is not loyal to our nation.' There was no escape for Jesus—so they thought" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 95). It was a diabolical scheme.

On the question they asked, Adam Clarke has the following comment: "The constitution of the Jewish republic rendered an answer to this question extremely difficult: (1) In the presence of

the people, who professed to have no other king but God, and looked on their independence as an essential point of their religion; (2) in the presence of the Pharisees, who were ready to stir up the people against Him if His decision could be at all construed to be contrary to their prejudices or to their religious rights; (3) in the presence of the Herodians, who, if the answer should appear to be against Caesar's rights, were ready to inflame their master to revenge, by the death of our Lord, the affront offered to his master, the emperor" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 813).

The questioners thought they were digging a pit into which Jesus would fall, but He soon showed them that they were caught themselves in an inescapable situation.

#### E. Exposure of Hypocrisy: v. 18

"But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?'" It will be remembered that the Greek word *hypocrites* means "an actor," one who wears a false face. Because of the lack of electric amplification in those days, actors wore large masks on their faces, with hidden megaphones in them.

These "spies, who pretended to be honest" (Luke 20:20), were wearing false faces. Pretending to be religious, they were crafty, deceitful murderers. They had only one desire and intent, and that was to destroy the holy prophet who had appeared among them.

#### F. The Tax Coin: v. 19

Instead of answering their question directly—"Yes" or "No"—and so falling into the trap they had laid, Jesus dealt with the problem in the most effective way. He said to His questioners, "Show me the coin used for paying the tax." So they "brought him a denarius." This was used to pay the poll tax to the Romans.

As we have already noted in a previous lesson, the denarius was worth

about twenty cents but would represent many times that in our present economy, for it was the regular day's wages. So the reward for one day's work went to the Roman government.

It has often been remarked that our Lord apparently did not have even one denarius in His possession; He had to ask for one. Luke tells us that some women who had been healed by Jesus followed Him and His twelve apostles, and adds: "These women were helping to support them out of their own means" (Luke 8:3). Jesus seems to have identified Himself with the poor people to show His compassionate love for them.

#### G. A Significant Question: v. 20

Perhaps turning the denarius over in His hand, Jesus asked: "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

Many of these silver coins have been dug up by archaeologists. I have a good silver reproduction of the denarius of Jesus' day. It has the name of Tiberius Caesar inscribed on it and also his portrait. Photographs of both sides of this coin, bearing the picture of the reigning Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), may be seen in most large Bible dictionaries.

Adam Clarke makes this comment on Jesus' question: "He knew well enough whose they were, but He showed the excellency of His wisdom in making them answer to their own confusion. They came to ensnare our Lord in His discourse, and now they are ensnared in their own. He who digs a pit for his neighbor ordinarily falls into it himself" (*Commentary*, p. 813).

#### H. Logical Consequence: v. 21

Since the coin bore the image and name of the emperor, it was obvious that it belonged to him. So Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." Then He added, "and to God what is God's." The human soul bears the image of God, though marred by sin, and so should be given to Him in full dedication.



Again Adam Clarke gives a good summary: "The conclusion is drawn from the premises. You acknowledge this to be Caesar's coin; this coin is current in your land; the currency of this coin shows the country to be under the Roman government; and your acknowledgment that it is Caesar's proves you have submitted. Do not, therefore, be unjust; but render to Caesar the things which you acknowledge to be his; at the same time... render unto God the things which belong to God. The image of princes stamped on their coin denotes that temporal things belong all to their government. The image of God stamped on the soul denotes that all its faculties and powers belong to the Most High, and should be employed in His service" (*Commentary*, p. 813).

### I. Silenced Foes: v. 22

The Pharisees and Herodians who had thought they could put Jesus in an inescapable corner were amazed at the way He eluded their trap. "So they left him and went away"—for awhile. They still were not convinced by His clear teaching—not enough to repent.

### II. MARRIAGE AT THE RESURRECTION: Matthew 22:23-33

#### A. Attitude of the Sadducees: v. 23

When the Pharisees and Herodians had been silenced, the Sadducees took their turn. Matthew notes that this sect denied any resurrection. We have to have that information in order to understand the question they asked.

The Sadducees had a special grudge against Jesus. We have noted that they had charge of the temple and its courts. When Jesus cleansed the temple area (21:12-13) he enraged the Sadducees. Encountering Him as He returned to the temple, they demanded: "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" (21:23). From then on they were determined to do away with Jesus.

### B. A Preposterous Story: vv. 24-27

Addressing Him as "Teacher," they reminded Him that "Moses told us if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him" (v. 24). The reference is to Deuteronomy 25:6, where we find what is called the law of levirate marriage. The first child of the new union would carry the first husband's name, so that his line would not end. Among the Jews it was considered very important that every man's name must be continued through his posterity—an interesting concept of immortality!

Then the Sadducees proceeded to tell a ridiculous story—theoretically possible, but practically almost impossible. They said that there were seven brothers, each of whom married a childless woman, in obedience to the law of levirate marriage. "Finally the woman died" (v. 27). One is almost tempted to interject, "No, not really?"

Of course, they were purposely trying to make the situation look as ridiculous as possible, just to make a point. We can probably assume that the story was made up, that no such situation ever existed.

### C. A Loaded Question: v. 28

Then the Sadducees pulled their "punch line": "Now then at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" They thought they had Jesus hooked! How would He get off the hook?

### D. Deserved Reproof: v. 29

Instead of being upset by the impossible question the Sadducees had asked, Jesus turned the tables on them. Straight from the shoulder He declared: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."

It has often been emphasized that the only way to save ourselves from error is to know the Word of God. And



this cannot be underscored too heavily. Every religious heresy that has risen in Christendom has shown ignorance of the Bible as intelligently and carefully read.

But it is also necessary to know the power of God as well as the Word of God. And it is the Holy Spirit who is especially the power of God. If we read our Bibles carefully and prayerfully, and humbly ask the Holy Spirit to teach us, we will never go astray.

### E. A Clear Answer: v. 30

Jesus asserted that at the resurrection there would be no marriage unions; in our glorified bodies we will be "like the angels in heaven." This clear statement should save us from all materialistic notions about the resurrection body. Paul says, "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (I Cor. 15:44). That ought to be clear enough for anyone.

### F. Proof of the Resurrection: vv. 31-32

"Have you not read what God said to you?" (v. 31). That question should jolt every nonreader of the Bible, and especially every careless reader.

Jesus quoted God's words to Moses: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod.

3:6). Then He made the application: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Adam Clarke notes that the passage Jesus quoted was from the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), "the only part of Scripture which the Sadducees acknowledged as divine." They were ignorant of their own Scriptures! Clarke goes on to say: "Let it be observed that Abraham was dead upwards of three hundred years before these words were spoken to Moses; yet still God calls himself the *God of Abraham*. Now Christ properly observes that God is *not the God of the dead* (that word being equal, in the sense of the Sadducees, to an eternal annihilation), *but of the living*. It therefore follows that, if He be the *God of Abraham... Isaac, and... Jacob*, these are not dead, but alive, alive with God, though they had ceased, for some hundreds of years, to exist as mortals" (*Commentary*, p. 813).

The point is that God did not say, "I was..." but "I am..." The Patriarchs were still alive.

### G. Astonishment of the Crowd: v. 33

"When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching"—not "doctrine" (KJV). Clarke comments, "God uses the infidelity of some for the edification of others. Truth always gains by being opposed" (p. 813).

## III. THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT: Matthew 22:34-40

### A. Question of the Lawyer: vv. 34-36

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they got together (v. 34). Probably the Sadducees had plagued them with the same question about the seven husbands, and they had had no answer.

One of the Pharisees, "an expert in the law" (of Moses) "tested" Jesus—evidently with good intent (cf. Mark

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why should we pay taxes?
2. How should we address ourselves to what we feel to be inequities?
3. When is disobedience of government justified?
4. How can we give to God what belongs to Him?
5. What will be the nature of the resurrection body?
6. How can we love our neighbor as ourself?

12:28). He asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (v. 36). It was an important question.

**B. The First Commandment: vv. 37-38**

Without hesitation Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" (v. 37). Then He added, "This is the first and greatest commandment" (v. 38). It clearly designates our first duty as human beings.

**C. The Second Commandment: vv. 39-40**

For good measure Jesus added the second greatest commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Then He declared, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (v. 40). Arndt and Gingrich observe, "As a door hangs on its hinges, so the whole Old Testament hangs on these two commandments" (*Lexicon*, p. 451).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Governments are not perfect. Even in the United States we get disturbed about what is going on at headquarters.

But it has often been said, probably correctly, that "Any government is better than no government." Human society cannot exist without some authority: in the home, at school, and in political government.

The teaching of the Bible is clear

that as children of God, whose "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, NIV, literal Greek), we are to be subject to governmental authority. Not only did Jesus declare that we should pay taxes, but Paul (Rom. 13:1-7) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:13-17) clearly emphasized submission to authorized government. This is our Christian duty.

March 22, 1981

## SIGNS OF THE END

DEVOTIONAL READING	Joshua 23:14-16
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Facing the Future with God</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Facing the Future with God</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 23—24:35</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 23:37—24:14</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.</i> Matthew 24:35</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>Learning to Serve</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 23:24</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 23:1, 11, 12; 24:45-47</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.</i> Matthew 23:12</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p><b>Mar. 16 M.:</b> The Greatest in the Kingdom. Matt. 23:1-12</p> <p><b>Mar. 17 T.:</b> Blind Guides. Matt. 23:13-22</p> <p><b>Mar. 18 W.:</b> Leaders Who Are Hypocrites. Matt. 23:23-32</p> <p><b>Mar. 19 T.:</b> Sufferings Before the End. Matt. 24:1-14</p> <p><b>Mar. 20 F.:</b> False Christs. Matt. 24:15-28</p> <p><b>Mar. 21 S.:</b> The Last Days. Matt. 24:29-35</p> <p><b>Mar. 22 S.:</b> Keeping the Covenant. Josh. 23:14-16</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us face the future with God, not with the news media and politicians.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> Passion Week of A.D. 30</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Jerusalem</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Signs of the End</b></p> <p><b>I. Lament Over Jerusalem:</b> Matthew 23:37-39</p> <p>A. A Rebellious City and a Loving God: v. 37</p> <p>B. A Desolate City: v. 38</p> <p>C. A City of Hope: v. 39</p> <p><b>II. The Setting for the Olivet Discourse:</b> Matthew 24:1-3</p> <p>A. The Beautiful Temple: v. 1</p> <p>B. The Prediction of Jesus: v. 2</p> <p>C. The Question of the Disciples: v. 3</p>

**III. Some Signs of the End: Matthew 24:4-8**

- A. Warning Against Deception: v. 4
- B. False Messiahs: v. 5
- C. Wars and Rumors of Wars: v. 6
- D. Famines and Earthquakes: v. 7
- E. Birth Pains of the Messianic Age: v. 8

**IV. More Signs of the End: Matthew 24:9-14**

- A. Persecution: v. 9
- B. Apostasy: v. 10
- C. False Prophets: v. 11
- D. Increase of Wickedness: v. 12
- E. Salvation for the Faithful: v. 13
- F. The Gospel Preached to All Nations: v. 14

**V. Further Signs of the End: Matthew 24:15-35**

Because of lack of time last week, we did not get to the closing paragraph of Matthew 22. We should like to look at that briefly by way of introduction today, since it projects an important truth.

Taking advantage of the Pharisees being gathered around Him (v. 4), He asked them a question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (v. 42). They believed the Messiah would come. Who would He be?

Knowing their sacred Scriptures, the Pharisees promptly answered, "The son of David." They had read this in such passages as Psalm 89:20-37; Isaiah 9:2-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:14-18; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24.

Now Jesus asked a second question: "How is it then that David speaking by the Spirit, called him 'Lord'?" (v. 43). Thereupon (v. 44) He quoted Psalm 110:1, and asked a third question: "If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" (v. 45).

"No one could say a word in reply" (v. 46). Fortunately we know the answer which the Pharisees were not able to give. Jesus was physically descended from David, but He was also the eternal Son of God.

Just a few years ago I was talking with a fine Christian girl who attended high school in an upper middle-class suburb of a big city. To my surprise she made this statement, "All that the kids talk about in the cafeteria at lunch time is the second coming." I was astounded.

In these days when there is so much interest in the return of Christ to earth we ought to do two things. In the first place, we should make sure that we are ready for His coming. That will be emphasized especially in the lesson next week. In the second place, we should study our Bibles carefully, so that we can answer questions and help other young people.

Our topic today is "Facing the Future with God." Never was there so much uncertainty about the future as we now

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH



CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

see reflected on television and in the newspapers. But if we are in Christ our future is safe and certain.

1. The Pharisees were the teachers of the sacred Scriptures in the Jewish synagogues.
2. Jesus set the example of being a servant to all.
3. We should follow Him in loving service to others.
4. We should try to be faithful servants.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM: Matthew 23:37-39

#### A. A Rebellious City and a Loving God: v. 37

What a striking combination! Here is the city that killed the prophets God sent to it, and yet He longs to gather its people together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings—"but you were not willing."

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." The repetition is emphatic and reveals something of the depth of compassion and concern that Jesus felt. One can almost hear the wail in His voice, based on the "woes" of the previous verses (13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). The religious leaders had led the nation astray and rejected God's messengers.

The picture of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings is a beautiful one. The purpose is protection and safety, warmth and comfort. And these are what we find in Christ when we come to Him at His call, instead of ignoring Him or running away from Him. One who has raised chickens can almost hear the mother hen clucking to her chickens to come.

#### B. A Desolate City: v. 38

"Look, your house is left to you desolate." The first application would perhaps be to the temple, which had largely failed to be a center of sincere religious worship. But the statement could take in the whole city. It did literally become "desolate" in A.D. 70 when

it was destroyed by the Romans, and again in A.D. 135, when the Romans made it a Gentile city and forbade any Jew to live in it again.

The widest application is that God forsook this sinful city because of its rejection of His Son. When God leaves us, we *are* desolate.

All one has to do is to think of the history of Jerusalem between A.D. 70 and 1967 (when Israel regained control of the Old City) to realize how "desolate" Jerusalem remained for nineteen centuries. The old Wailing Wall, where for endless generations the Jews had gathered to bewail their sad fate and to pray for the Messiah to come, is now officially called the West Wall. Jews still pray there, but they are thankful for being restored to Jerusalem.

#### C. A City of Hope: v. 39

Jesus told the people of Jerusalem that they would not see Him again until they said, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (quoting Psalm 118:26). This will happen at His second coming, when they will receive Him, and not reject Him as they did at His first advent.

The words of Jesus in this verse present both a solemn warning and a gleam of hope. The centuries ahead were to be filled with sorrow and suffering for the sins of a rebellious people. But in the return of the Jews to Jerusalem we can glimpse a tiny light shining in the darkness. The day will soon dawn.

On this paragraph I have written: "This is one of the most plaintive cries of the compassionate Christ. It was His parting word to 'the city of the great king' (5:35), which had nevertheless rejected its King (chap. 21). Instead of being sheltered (v. 37) it would be forsaken (v. 38). Never would it see Him again until it welcomed Him as Messiah (v. 39). 'And ye would not' (v. 37) are among the saddest words ever written" (*The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 100).

## II. THE SETTING FOR THE OLIVET DISCOURSE: Matthew 24:1-3

The Olivet Discourse (so called because it was spoken on the Mount of Olives; see v. 3) is the only long discourse of Jesus recorded in all three synoptic Gospels (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), and its subject is the second coming of Christ! This alone should say something to us about the importance of the doctrine of the second coming. Many people raise their eyebrows when a preacher emphasizes this teaching of the New Testament. But it is clear that the subject held high priority for Christ, who spoke these words; for the Holy Spirit, who inspired all three evangelists to include them; and for the early church, which circulated these three Gospels as sacred Scripture. When we refuse to give attention to the second coming we are ignoring an area of teaching that is found in most of the books of the New Testament.

### A. The Beautiful City: v. 1

"Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings." These were magnificent structures that had been erected by Herod the Great shortly before the birth of Christ. It is said that the sanctuary itself was about one hundred fifty feet in height and one of the most beautiful sacred edifices in the world of that day. Constructed of white marble, its roof was gilded with

gold. It is claimed that when travelers topped or rounded the Mount of Olives and caught their first glimpse of the temple, they would gasp in amazement. The disciples were very proud of their beautiful temple buildings.

### B. The Prediction of Jesus: v. 2

The disciples must have been severely shaken and deeply shocked when their Master said to them: "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." This prediction was fulfilled very literally in A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed the city and burned the temple area.

Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century, was living in Palestine when all this happened. He tells us: "Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the whole city and temple, except the three towers, Phaselus, Hippicus, and Mariamne, and a part of the western wall, and these were spared; but, for all the rest of the wall, it was laid so even with the ground, by those who dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited" (*Jewish War*, vii.i). It was one of the most tragic events in Jewish history and its consequences covered centuries of time.

### C. The Question of the Disciples: v. 3

"Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives," overlooking the temple area from a height of about two hundred feet. The view is breath-taking.

His disciples "came to Him privately." Probably they were still badly shaken by His words as He left the temple. Earnestly, fearfully, they said to Him: "Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Actually, this is a threefold question. The first question, naturally, was, "When will this happen?" that is, the destruction of the temple that He had

just predicted, and which took place forty years later, in A.D. 70.

The second and third questions were, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age"—not "world" (KJV). In the minds of the Jews this would be one, single event, and we would all agree, probably, that the second coming will mark the end of the church age.

It is a bit difficult to differentiate all these in the discourse that follows. But one could suggest that verses 3-14 give us primarily signs of the end of the age, while verses 15-28 could refer to both the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the end time. Verses 29-44 clearly relate to the second coming.

### III. SOME SIGNS OF THE END:

Matthew 24:4-8

#### A. Warning Against Deception: v. 4

"Watch out that no one deceives you." This must be a real danger, or Christ would not have sounded this solemn warning. We need to be constantly on our guard against being deceived by false religious leaders.

#### B. False Messiahs: v. 5

As early as the first century false messiahs were leading people astray. Adam Clarke notes: "Josephus says (*War*, b. ii, c.13) that there were many who pretending to divine inspiration, deceived the people, leading out numbers of them to the desert, pretending that God would there show them the signs of liberty, meaning redemption from the Roman power, and that an Egyptian false prophet led 30,000 men into the desert, who were almost all cut off by Felix. See Acts xxi. 38. . . . About twelve years after the death of our Lord, when Cuspus Fadus was procurator of Judea, arose an imposter of the name of Theudas, who said he was a prophet, and persuaded a great multitude to follow him . . . to the river Jordan, which he promised to divide for

their passage; and saying these things, says Josephus, 'he deceived many'—almost the very words of our Lord. A few years afterwards, under the reign of Nero, while Felix was procurator of Judea, impostors of this stamp were so frequent that some were taken and killed almost every day (Josephus, *Ant.*, b. xx, cc. 4 and 7)" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 817).

The outstanding false messiah was Bar Kochba (A.D. 135), who was accepted as such by some rabbi. When the Romans put down his rebellion they made Jerusalem an all-Gentile city.

#### C. Wars and Rumors of Wars: v. 6

This is a sign that hardly needs documentation. Soon after 1925 some Harvard historians got together and came up with the conclusion that the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century constituted the bloodiest quarter century in all history, due to the First World War. But what about the bloodier Second World War in the next quarter century? And we have lived with "wars and rumors of wars" ever since!

#### D. Famines and Earthquakes: v. 7

As with wars and rumors of wars, so famines and earthquakes have occurred in every century since Christ said these words. But probably most would agree that these signs have all increased in *intensity* and *frequency* in our own generation, and we believe that this is a significant warning that we may be approaching the end time.

#### E. Birth Pains of the Messianic Age: v. 8

"All these are the beginning of sorrows" (KJV), is too weak a translation. The Greek word translated "sorrows" means "birth-pangs." The rabbis talked about the "birth-pangs of the Messiah," which would precede the birth of the messianic age. That is what Jesus is



talking about here. So the correct translation is: "All these are the beginning of birth pains" (NIV).

Just as a mother forgets the preceding pains when she gives birth to a beautiful child, so we will look back on the hardships and sufferings of this life as nothing compared with the glory of reigning with Christ in His kingdom.

#### IV. MORE SIGNS OF THE END: Matthew 24:9-14

##### A. Persecution: v. 9

The persecution of Christians began soon after Pentecost, as we learn from the Books of Acts. And it has continued down across the centuries.

What about our day? We think of the intense persecution of Christians by communist governments in China, Russia, and other countries. Perhaps the list of martyrs for the faith is as long in our century as in any preceding one.

##### B. Apostasy: v. 10

"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other." Apostasy is not a matter of backsliding but of a falling away from the Christian faith. Many of these apostates, Jesus said, would betray each other. Tacitus gives a striking example of this during the persecution under Nero (A.D. 64-68). He says, "At first several were seized, who confessed, and then by their discovery a great multitude of others were convicted and executed" (*Annal*, I, xv.).

This has happened across the centuries. But we believe that a good case could be made for more frequent occurrences of this sort of thing in our own century, especially in communist countries. In fact, one could well say that communism itself is a significant sign of the end of the age.

##### C. False Prophets: v. 11

Perhaps the worst case ever seen of a false prophet is that of the Reverend

Jim Jones. His story has parallels to those of the first century related by Josephus (noted above). He led about a thousand duped followers to Guyana where some nine hundred died by drinking poison on his orders. There have been other less spectacular false prophets in our day, who have deceived many people.

##### D. Increase of Wickedness: v. 12

"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." Certainly no one needs to marshal evidence that wickedness has greatly increased in our day. All that one needs to do is to read the newspaper, listen to the radio, or watch television. The news broadcasts document the fact abundantly, telling of atrocities never dreamed of before, and the open pornography of newsstands and television surpasses anything one could possibly imagine would take place. Let's not let our love grow cold because of all this!

##### E. Salvation for the Faithful: v. 13

This verse clearly indicates that only those who remain "firm to the end" will finally be saved. This is a significant warning to every Christian.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was it essential that Jews should return to Palestine before the return of Christ?
2. What happened to Judaism when the temple was destroyed?
3. Do we have any false messiahs today?
4. What areas have not received the gospel?
5. What will be the nature of the second coming?
6. What may the leafing of the fig tree symbolize today?



### F. The Gospel Preached to All Nations: v. 14

Jesus declared that when the gospel had been preached "in the whole world as a testimony to all nations," the end would come. Has this condition been fulfilled? I would say yes. While not every *tribe* has heard the gospel, probably every *nation* has.

A significant angle of this is the translation of God's Word into the languages of the world. I have traced this a bit in chapter 5 ("Its Propagation") of my book, *How We Got Our Bible* (pp. 85-100).

On the eve of printing (1456) parts of the Bible were translated into only 33 languages. Even by 1800 the Bible was in only 71 languages. But in the next thirty years people of 86 additional languages received some part of the Bible—more than in all the eighteen centuries before! By 1938 the translations of Scripture had passed 1,000. Now the figure is over 1,600! This is a significant preparation for the second coming of Christ.

### V. FURTHER SIGNS OF THE END: Matthew 24:15-35

Verses 15-25 have a double reference. The first is to the destruction of

Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which is suggested by verse 16: "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Eusebius tells us that the Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella, east of the Jordan, and so escaped the destruction (*Ecclesiastical History*, III, 5). The urgency of the flight is emphasized in verses 17-20. For his Jewish readers Matthew adds "or on the Sabbath" (v. 20; cf. Mark 13:18), because Jews were only allowed to travel a short distance on the Sabbath day.

But there may well be a reference also to the end of the age. Verses 15 and 21 seem to favor that interpretation.

Verses 26-31 clearly present signs of the second coming (see vv. 27, 30, 31). Verse 27 indicates that this event will be sudden, and probably also that it will be visible. The same goes for verse 30.

In verses 32-35 Jesus gives a lesson from the fig tree (v. 32). A general application is made: "when you see all these things" (v. 33). But it may also refer to the establishment of the State of Israel (the fig tree).

For an extensive treatment of verse 34 see the last chapter of my book, *What the Bible Says About the Second Coming* (Baker Book House).

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

A number of years ago my wife said to me, "I haven't heard you preach on the second coming for a long time." I agreed and told her why: I had heard so much wild speculation on the subject that I had been turned off.

Faithful wife that she is, she proceeded to set me straight on that matter. "Honey, you have no right to neg-

lect a subject that plays such a large part in the New Testament, just because some people are unwise in handling the theme."

So I prayed about it and soon developed some sermons on the second coming. Out of these came the book, *What the Bible Says About the Second Coming*.

March 29, 1981

## BE READY—BE FAITHFUL

DEVOTIONAL READING	Joshua 24:16-24
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Be Prepared</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Be Prepared</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 24:36—25:46</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 25:1-13</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.</i> Matthew 25:13</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>The Importance of Being Prepared</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 25</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 25:1-13</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Good sense makes a man slow to anger.</i> Proverbs 19:11</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>Mar. 23 M.: Watch and Be Ready. Matt. 24:36-44</p> <p>Mar. 24 T.: Be Faithful Servants. Matt. 24:45-51</p> <p>Mar. 25 W.: When the Bridegroom Comes. Matt. 25:1-13</p> <p>Mar. 26 T.: Talents Are to Be Used. Matt. 25:14-30</p> <p>Mar. 27 F.: Those Who Inherit the Kingdom. Matt. 25:31-40</p> <p>Mar. 28 S.: Those Who Fail to Help. Matt. 25:41-46</p> <p>Mar. 29 S.: Choosing to Serve the Lord. Josh. 24:16-24</p>
LESSON AIM	To show the necessity of being ready for the return of Christ.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> A.D. 30</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Jerusalem</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Be Ready—Be Faithful</b></p> <p><b>I. Parable of the Ten Virgins:</b> Matthew 25:1-13</p> <p>A. Two Classes of Virgins: vv. 1-2</p> <p>B. Lack of Preparation: v. 3</p> <p>C. Careful Preparation: v. 4</p> <p>D. Delayed Coming: v. 5</p> <p>E. The Midnight Cry: v. 6</p> <p>F. The Problem: vv. 7-9</p> <p>G. Too Late: vv. 10-12</p> <p>H. Final Admonition: v. 13</p>

**II. Parable of the Talents: Matthew 25:14-30**

- A. Investment of Talents: vv. 14-18
- B. The Man with Five Talents: vv. 19-21
- C. The Man with Two Talents: vv. 22-23
- D. The Man with One Talent: vv. 24-27
- E. The Fate of the Unfaithful Servant: vv. 28-30

**III. The Sheep and the Goats: Matthew 25:31-46**

- A. Separation of the Sheep and Goats: vv. 31-33
- B. Welcome to the Sheep: vv. 34-36
- C. Surprised Reaction: vv. 37-40
- D. Rejection of the Goats: vv. 41-43
- E. Surprised Protest: vv. 44-45
- F. Two Final Destinies: v. 46

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

The background Scripture today begins with the last section of chapter 24 (vv. 36-51). This will form a good introduction to our study of chapter 25.

Jesus made a very strong assertion: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." The phrase "neither the Son" is found in the King James Version in the parallel passage (Mark 13:32) but not in Matthew. But the oldest Greek manuscripts have it here also. In His humanity, in the Incarnation, Jesus' knowledge was limited. He Himself did not know the time of His second coming.

Jesus compared the conditions at His return with "the days of Noah" (v. 37). People at that time were busy with the pursuits of this life and unprepared for the flood.

The main emphasis of the Olivet Discourse is stated briefly and forcefully in verse 42: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." We should put with this verse 44: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." *Watch* and *be ready* are the two main admonitions of the Master.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

"Be prepared" has been a military slogan in our country in times of threatened war. But it is a constant command to Christians.

The only way to be ready for the second coming of Christ is to be prepared every day for it, for we do not know the time of His coming.

The three parables of Matthew 25 suggest three ways we should be prepared for the second coming. The first, the ten virgins (vv. 1-13), says we need always to have an up-to-date spiritual experience in our hearts. The second, the talents, tell us to be busy in the Lord's service, making the most of the talents He has given us. The third, the sheep and the goats, warns of our social responsibility to others.

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. We need to be ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

2. To do this we must have our spiritual lamps burning brightly.
3. We must also use our talents for the Lord.
4. We must be kind to others, and so to Christ.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. PARABLE OF THE TEN

#### VIRGINS:

#### Matthew 25:1-13

"All the material in chapter 25 is found only in Matthew. It is his addition to the Olivet Discourse. That it was a part of that discourse is suggested by the recurring refrain in verse 13 (cf. 24:42)" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 105-106).

#### A. Two Classes of Virgins: vv. 1-2

Again we have a kingdom parable. "At that time," Jesus says, "the kingdom of heaven will be like." As we have seen, Matthew especially emphasizes the kingdom.

In this parable the kingdom is compared to "ten virgins who took their lamps"—Greek, *lampadas*—"and went out to meet the bridegroom." The latter would be coming, with his male attendants, to the bride's house for the wedding feast. Then he would take her to his home to live. The bridesmaids, as we might call the ten virgins—the pattern of the East was to use many people—were to go out to the edge of the town and escort the bridegroom and his party to the bride's house.

The ten virgins were divided into two categories: "Five of them were foolish and five were wise" (v. 2). The Greek word for "foolish" here is *morai*, from which we get our word *moron*. The word for wise is *phronimoi*, from *phrenos*, "mind." They were thoughtful, prudent, using their heads.

#### B. Lack of Preparation: v. 3

"The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them." The

lamps were made of clay and were so small that they would fit right into the palm of one's hand. They had a circular hole in the top for putting in the *olive oil*, which is what the Bible means when it speaks of "oil." Usually there was another, smaller hole through which the wick protruded. These little lamps would hold only a fraction of a cup of oil, so they would not burn for many hours. But the bridegroom was doubtless expected to arrive in the early evening, and the time of waiting would be brief.

These "morons" reasoned that way. But wise people know that emergencies sometimes arise. It is only the "foolish" who do not prepare for emergencies.

#### C. Careful Preparation: v. 4

"The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps." They realized that delays do happen. So they each took along a small jar of olive oil to prepare for any eventualities. And their prudence paid off!

#### D. Delayed Coming: v. 5

"The bridegroom was a long time in coming and they all became drowsy and fell asleep."

Why was the bridegroom so late? We don't know. We do know that the grandfather of the great missionary J. Hudson Taylor got so busy with other things that he forgot it was his wedding day and did not show up for the ceremony. His fiancée forgave him, set another date, and they were finally married. Otherwise there might have never been a J. Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission!

As the evening wore on and the bridegroom did not put in his appear-



ance, the girls finally “began to nod and went on sleeping”—so the literal Greek. We can see them all talking eagerly at first, then becoming tired, struggling to keep their eyes open. After awhile heads began to nod in spite of all they could do. Finally they all succumbed and were sleeping soundly.

### E. The Midnight Cry: v.6

“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’” Perhaps the city watchman had seen the flicker of lights in the distance and then recognized the bridegroom’s party as it approached. Knowing that the girls were waiting to welcome the groom, he sounded the alert.

It has well been suggested that Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, may come at the world’s hour of “midnight”—morally and spiritually. When we see the dense darkness around us in these two areas, it should raise our hopes rather than cause despair. We should do what we can to turn on the lights in this darkness, and must always let our own light shine as brightly as possible (Matt. 5:14, 16). The moral midnight is no sign that God is dead. It may be the very setting for the most glorious day yet—the coming of Christ to set up His kingdom.

### F. The Problem: vv. 7-9

“Then all those virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps” (v. 7). Anyone who has used oil lamps knows that wicks need to be trimmed as the oil gets low and the wicks become charred.

The Greek verb for “trim” is *cosmeo*, from which we get *cosmetics*. It literally means “put in order.” Since these little clay lamps would have no glass globes to clean, as our oil lamps have, the main thing to be done would be trimming the small wick.

“The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out’” (v. 8)—not “gone out” (KJV). The Greek does not have the aorist

tense of completed action but rather the present tense of continuing action. The lamps had not gone out but were burning low; they soon would be out. And the foolish virgins knew the light would not last long enough for the time it would take to greet the bridegroom and lead him to the bride’s house. They needed more oil right away.

The answer of the five wise virgins was: “No, there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves” (v.9). At first thought, these words may seem selfish and unkind. Why not share a little bit, at least?

But there is a principle involved here that Jesus wanted to get across. It is this: No one can impart his own spiritual life to someone else; each of us has to have his/her own spiritual experience. A child cannot get into heaven on a parent’s experience, or vice versa. A husband or wife cannot borrow the other’s spiritual life. Each individual has to have a personal relationship to God, which is not dependent on anyone else.

### G. Too Late: vv. 10-12

While the five foolish virgins were on their way to buy the oil—they probably would not have found any shops open at that time of the night anyway—the bridegroom arrived. “The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut” (v. 10).

The Greek word for “ready” is the same as the one in 24:44. Here we have an example of some who were not ready and some who were. The latter went in with the bridegroom to the wedding feast. This normally lasted for a week, and sometimes for as long as three weeks. In Jerusalem today some wedding celebrations are carried on every evening for a week.

After the wedding party had gone in to the bride’s house, “the door was shut.” This is the language of settled, eternal destiny. Once the door is shut, it cannot be reopened.

This crucial truth is vividly illustrated in verses 11 and 12. Too late the five foolish virgins came, probably still with no oil, and found the door shut. Desperately they called out, "Sir! Sir! Open the door for us!" But the master of the house answered, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you." He dared not open the street door at that hour of the night, for fear some dangerous persons might be trying to "crash the party," as sometimes happens today. So the foolish virgins were left outside in the dark, while inside all was light and festivity. It is a sad picture of "outer darkness" forever.

Some might wonder why "Lord, Lord" (KJV) has been changed to "Sir, Sir" (NIV). The answer is that the Greek word *kyrie* was not only used in addressing deity but also in speaking to any *man* respectfully. It was the latter in this case. And for that today we do not say "Lord" but "Sir." Even the King James Version translates *kyrie* as "sir" a dozen times in the New Testament, including seven times in John's Gospel (4:11, 15, 19, 49; 5:7; 12:21; 20:15).

#### H. Final Admonition: v. 13

"Therefore keep watch"—present tense in Greek, "keep on watching," or "be on the alert." The verb literally means "stay awake." This is the keynote of the Olivet discourse. Why keep on the alert? "Because you do not know the day or the hour" of the second coming. We have to be ready all the time.

## II. PARABLE OF THE TALENTS: Matthew 25:14-30

"The Parable of the Ten Virgins teaches the necessity of keeping one's inward Christian experience up-to-date, with full spiritual glow fed by the oil of the Spirit. The Parable of the Talents emphasizes the need of being active in service for the Lord. These two—the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer, the passive and the active—are both equally important as essential parts of one's preparation

for the coming of the Christ" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 106-107).

#### A. Investment of Talents: vv. 14-18

Jesus compared the kingdom to "a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them" (v. 14). To one servant he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent—"each according to his ability" (v. 15). Then he departed.

"The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more" (v. 16). "So also, the one with the two talents gained two more" (v. 17). They both doubled the amount of money given them.

"But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money" (v. 18). The fact that each talent was worth more than a thousand dollars shows the enormity of his crime.

#### B. The Man with Five Talents: vv. 19-21

"After a long time [it must have been, to allow for doubling the investment] the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them" (v. 19). The five-talent man was able to report: "Master, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more" (v. 20).

Notice the commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (v. 21). He didn't say clever, smart, or brilliant. Just two things counted—"good and faithful"—character and service. And all of us can qualify on those two points, if we are willing to.

"I will put you in charge of many things." The reward for faithful service is more work to do! But that is the way all successful lives operate. The final reward? "Come and share your master's happiness." As we say today, "All this and heaven, too!"

### C. The Man with Two Talents: vv. 22-23

This man gave basically the same report and he received precisely the same reward (vv. 21, 23). Why? Because he did just as much, doubling his master's money.

### D. The Man with One Talent: vv. 24-27

Now comes the whiner: "Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed." Those who do nothing usually blame others for their failure!

The master's reply was firm and logical: "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have it back with interest" (vv. 26-27). The servant claimed to be honest (see v. 25b), but he had robbed his master of interest on the money entrusted to him.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the first parable, why did Jesus use the figure of the bridegroom?
2. Why is it important that we be ready every moment for Christ's coming?
3. What should we do with our talents?
4. How do we discover what talents we have?
5. Why has the church neglected social responsibility?
6. How can we individually discharge this responsibility?

### E. The Fate of the Unfaithful Servant: vv. 28-30

The one talent was taken from this servant and given to the one with ten talents. Verse 29 states a great principle: failure to use what we have results in the loss of everything. Put briefly, it is this: *use or lose*.

The "worthless servant" was thrown "outside, into the darkness." Eternal night is the fate of the unfaithful.

## III. THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS: Matthew 25:31-46

The question is often raised as to whether this is a parable or not. Floyd Filson writes, "Vss. 31-46 give not a parable but a description of the last judgment" (*A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 266). On the other hand, A. T. Robertson, a strong evangelical, lists it among the parables. Actually, the lesson is just as powerful whichever way it is taken. The use of "sheep" and "goats" is the main argument for its being a parable.

### A. Separation of the Sheep and Goats: vv. 31-33

Christ said that when He returned in His glory, "and all the angels with him," He would "sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (v. 31). "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left" (vv. 32-33).

On the basis of "them" (KJV) in verse 32, taken as referring back to "all nations," some have held that this is a separate judgment—the judgment of the nations. But in the Greek "them" is masculine, while "nations" is neuter. That is the reason for saying "people" (NIV), which is masculine in the Greek. It is individual people, not nations as such, that will be judged at the end.



### B. Welcome to the Sheep: vv. 34-36

To those on his right the King will say: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father: take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (v. 34). Why? Because of the way "you" ministered to "me" in my need (vv. 35-36).

### C. Surprised Reaction: vv. 37-40

The righteous, astonished, will ask when they saw Him in need. His significant answer: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (v. 40). Those who hold to separate judgment of the nations interpret "brothers" as meaning the Jews. But there is no justification for such a narrow interpretation; all believers are brothers of Jesus.

### D. Rejection of the Goats: vv. 41-43

To those on the left the King will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (v. 41). They had not ministered to Him.

### E. Surprised Protest: vv. 44-45

Again (cf. v. 37) the question is "When?" The answer is on the same

basis as with the others (vv. 40, 45).

### F. Two Final Destinies: v. 46

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." The teaching here is inescapable: If there is eternal life for the righteous, there is also eternal punishment for the wicked.

What does the story of the sheep and the goats have to say to us today? I have written: "This passage stands as a strong indictment of the church for its lack of social conscience. Had the church carried out fully the teachings of Jesus as set forth here, there would have been no place for the rise of the so-called social gospel.

"John Wesley is one of the finest examples of an evangelical Christian who practiced what Jesus preached. He devoted a good deal of his time ministering to the poor and imprisoned, at the same time winning thousands of converts to Christ" (*WBC*, IV, 108).

The three main sections of this chapter emphasize three ways in which we must be prepared for the second coming of Christ: (1) in our inner spiritual life, vv. 1-13; (2) in faithful service, vv. 14-30; (3) in compassionate ministry to those in need, vv. 31-46. Most people give attention to only one, or at the most, two of these, yet all three are important.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

In Matthew 25:8 the King James Version has the foolish virgins saying, "Our lamps are gone out." But the Greek clearly says, "Our lamps are going out."

Is the distinction worth noting? I believe so. There are many church members who still go to church regularly and outwardly maintain a religious life. But the inner glow of their spiritual experience is getting dim. They have

become careless about their private devotions and no longer listen carefully for the voice of the Spirit guiding their daily walk.

These people feel content and complacent about their religious status. But actually they are in danger. If Jesus should come unexpectedly, they would not be prepared, and would be left behind. We need to "maintain the spiritual glow."



April 5, 1981

## PREPARING FOR DIFFICULT TIMES

DEVOTIONAL READING	Isaiah 51:4-6
	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Preparing for Difficult Times</i>
	<b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Preparing for Difficult Times</i>
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 26
	<b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 26:1-16
	<b>Memory Verse:</b> "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Matthew 26:39
	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Jesus, the King</i>
	<b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 26
CHILDREN	<b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 21:1-3, 6-9; 26:17-20
	<b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Blessed is he who comes in the name of our Lord!</i> Matthew 21:9
	<b>Mar. 30 M.:</b> News Difficult to Accept. Mark 8:31-37
	<b>Mar. 31 T.:</b> High-level Consultation. Matt. 26:1-5
	<b>Apr. 1 W.:</b> Costly Devotion. Matt. 26:6-13
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>Apr. 2 T.:</b> Betrayed by a Friend. Matt. 26:14-16, 21-25
	<b>Apr. 3 F.:</b> The Last Supper. Matt. 26:20-29
	<b>Apr. 4 S.:</b> Breaking Under Pressure. Matt. 26:31-35
	<b>Apr. 5 S.:</b> Finding Strength Through Pressure. Matt. 26:36-46
LESSON AIM	To help us see how Jesus prepared for the crucifixion.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> April, A.D. 30
	<b>Place:</b> Jerusalem
	<b>Preparing for Difficult Times</b>
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>I. The Plot Against Jesus:</b> Matthew 26:1-5
	A. Two Days Before the Passover: vv. 1-2
	B. Meeting of the Sanhedrin: v. 3
	C. Plot to Arrest and Kill Jesus: v. 4
	D. Fear of a Riot: v. 5
	<b>II. The Anointing at Bethany:</b> Matthew 26:6-13
	A. The Place: v. 6
	B. The Perfume: v. 7
	C. The Protest: vv. 8-9

- D. The Defense: vv. 10-11
- E. Reason for the Anointing: v. 12
- F. A Fitting Memorial: v. 13

### III. The Plot to Betray: Matthew 26:14-16

- A. Judas Iscariot: v. 14
- B. Making a Bargain: v. 15
- C. Watching for an Opportunity: v. 16

### IV. The Lord's Supper: Matthew 26:17-30

### V. Jesus in Gethsemane: Matthew 26:31-46

### VI. Arrest of Jesus: Matthew 26:47-56

### VII. The Jewish Trial: Matthew 26:57-68

Today we begin our fifth and last unit in the study of Matthew. It is entitled: "Through Suffering to Victory." It covers chapters 26-28 of the Gospel.

The events follow one another in quick succession: the plot to kill Jesus, the anointing at Bethany, the plot to betray Jesus, the Lord's Supper, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, His arrest, His Jewish trial, the death of Judas Iscariot, the Roman trial, the mockery of the soldiers, the crucifixion, the death of Jesus, His burial, the posting of the guards, the resurrection, the report of the guards, and finally the Great Commission to the disciples. It is an exciting story!

We shall not have time to cover all these events in detail. But these chapters should be read through several times during the month of April, while we commemorate the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. We should seek earnestly to go through these experiences with Him.

Preparing for difficult times is what we find Jesus doing in today's lesson.

There were two preparations. First, Jesus sought to prepare *His disciples* for the terrible shock that would come to them. He did this especially at the Last Supper, the night before His crucifixion. He had already predicted this event three times, as we have seen. But now He lovingly took time to help His disciples see the meaning of the passover in relation to His crucifixion, as they partook of the emblems of His body and blood that would soon be given for their salvation.

Then Jesus prepared *Himself* right after this by His agonizing prayer in Gethsemane. The lesson for us here is that we should put others first in the crises of life.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Palm Sunday, a week before Easter, celebrates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

2. It is called this because the people worshiped Jesus and waved palm branches, which were the symbol of victory (John 12:13).
3. The passover celebrated the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt.
4. Jesus turned it into the Lord's Supper.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE PLOT AGAINST JESUS:

Matthew 26:1-5

#### A. Two Days Before the Passover: vv. 1-2

"When Jesus had finished saying all these things" (v. 1). We find this formula (basically) at the close of each of the five great discourses of Jesus given in Matthew's Gospel (7:28; 11:1; 15:53; 19:1; 26:1).

Then Jesus said to His disciples: "As you know, the Passover is two days away" (v. 2). Since it appears that Jesus ate the passover with His disciples (cf. v. 17) on Thursday evening, the night before His crucifixion, this would be Tuesday.

Jesus had already predicted His passion (suffering) three times, as we have seen in our previous lessons. Now the time was approaching fast, and so again He said, "The Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." That is, the Jewish Sanhedrin would hand Him over to the Roman governor for execution. (The Jewish method of capital punishment was by stoning, not crucifixion.)

#### B. Meeting of the Sanhedrin: v. 3

"The chief priests and the elders of the people" constituted the great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, the supreme court of Israel. They "assembled in the palace of the high priest," which was not far from the temple area. The high priest at this time was Caiaphas, who held this office from A.D. 18-36.

#### C. Plot to Arrest and Kill Jesus: v.

4

"They plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him." The single Greek word for "in some sly way" literally means "by deceit" or "by craftiness." It is a sad day when religious leaders are willing to be deceitful in trying to trap a good man. By now the members of the Sanhedrin—both Pharisees and Sadducees—were determined to put Jesus to death.

#### D. Fear of a Riot: v. 5

It was usual for the Jewish leaders to punish criminals at the time of "the Feast"—that is, the passover. But in this case they were afraid to do so. Jesus was so popular with the crowds, especially the many thousands of pilgrims who came from Galilee to celebrate the passover in Jerusalem, that the leaders were fearful of an insurrection. So they decided to put off His arrest until the Galilean pilgrims had left.

### II. THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY:

Matthew 26:6-13

#### A. The Place: v. 6

This anointing took place at "Bethany," a small village on the opposite (east) side of the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem. It was "in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper," perhaps a well-known person whom Jesus had cured of leprosy.

This incident is also recorded by Mark (14:3-9). The two accounts are closely parallel.

Some have confused this with an anointing of Jesus recorded in Luke 7:36-50. But the differences far outweigh the similarities. Luke's incident is placed in Galilee, at a much earlier date. This one was in Judea, near Jerusalem, and shortly before Jesus' crucifixion. In Galilee it was a sinful woman off the street who anointed Him, after washing His feet with her tears of repentance. Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven. There is nothing of that here. Furthermore, it was Jesus' host, a Pharisee, who complained in Galilee. Here it is the disciples. Thus these are two entirely different incidents.

But what about the anointing of Jesus recorded in John 12:2-8? That was in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. And we are told that it was Mary who poured perfume on Jesus' feet. If this is the same anointing as that recorded in Matthew and Luke, then presumably Simon the Leper was the father of Lazarus and the two sisters.

There is only one problem in equating the two—a chronological one. In John 12:1 we read: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived in Bethany." In verse 2 we are told: "Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor." Then follows the story of the anointing by Mary. In Matthew and Mark we are told, preceding the incident, that the passover was two days away.

The best solution seems to be that Jesus arrived in Bethany on the previous Friday afternoon, before the Sabbath began at sunset. (He would not break the law by traveling on the Sabbath.) This would be six days before the passover. It should be noted that both Matthew and Mark say, "while Jesus was in Bethany." He had stayed at the home of Martha and Mary that week, and now the anointing was on Tuesday night.

### B. The Perfume: v. 7

"A woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on His head as he was reclining at the table." Inciden-

tally, "as he sat at meat" (KJV) is not only uncontemporary but also incorrect. The one Greek word for this whole expression means "reclining," not sitting. Upper-class Jewish homes followed the Roman custom of reclining while eating.

Also "alabaster box" (KJV) is misleading. The Greek has just one word *alabastron*. This was probably a flask, "a vessel with rather a long neck which was broken off when the contents were used" (W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 33). The Greek word for "very expensive" is *barytimos*, which literally means "heavy in value." John has Judas Iscariot saying that it was "worth a year's wages" (John 12:5)—Greek, three hundred denarii. It is very possible that Mary's life's savings were represented in that alabaster jar of perfume. But she did not hesitate to pour it all on Jesus. Mark graphically says, "She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head" (14:3).

### C. The Protest: vv. 8-9

"When the disciples saw this, they were indignant" (v. 8). John specifically mentions Judas Iscariot as complaining (12:4-5). The disciples asked, "Why this waste?" This is the typical attitude of unspiritual minds. But real love is not cold, calculating; it enjoys giving lavishly to the one who is loved.

Then the disciples added, "This perfume could have been sold for a high price [three hundred denarii, Judas said] and given to the poor" (v. 9). It sounded very pious and practical, but it showed a lack of deep love for Jesus. Mark says, "Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another" (14:4). Apparently there was a general protest, with Judas Iscariot taking the lead in it.

### D. The Defense: vv. 10-11

"Aware of this, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me'"



(v. 10). This last sentence is translated, "She hath wrought a good work upon me" in the King James Version. Actually, the Greek adjective here, *kalos*, means both "good" and "beautiful." It is the word that describes aesthetic beauty, while *agathos* describes ethical goodness. Mary did a beautiful thing to Jesus! Such spontaneous, lavish gifts of love, are always beautiful. What the world needs is to see a lot more of them!

Then Jesus added, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me" (v. 11). The point is that they would have plenty of opportunity in the coming years to give to the poor, but if they wanted to express their love to Him personally, the time was very limited. It is still true that what we do must be done in perspective.

#### E. Reason for the Anointing: v. 12

"When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial." This is a most intriguing statement. In Mark 16:1 we read, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body." This was on Saturday evening after the crucifixion. In Luke 23:55-56 we find "the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee... went home and prepared spices and perfumes," which they took to the tomb on Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body. The interesting thing is that Mary of Bethany (in Judea) is not mentioned with these. Why?

It has been suggested that Luke 10:39 may give us the answer. While others were busy bustling about, Mary "sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." There is a possibility that she was the only one who really understood that He was going to be crucified and then rise from the dead, so she anointed His body beforehand for burial.

#### F. A Fitting Memorial: v. 13

"I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the

world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." No one present that day, including Mary herself, could possibly have imagined all that would be involved in the fulfillment of this declaration. Throughout nineteen centuries and now in practically all the countries of the world, countless millions of people have heard or read this story of Mary's anointing Jesus. Little do we know the potential influence of an act of genuine, unselfish love.

### III. THE PLOT TO BETRAY: Matthew 26:14-16

#### A. Judas Iscariot: v. 14

It seems unbelievable that "one of the Twelve"—emphasized here—would have betrayed Jesus, his own Master, to death. Yet such was the case.

He was "the one called Judas Iscariot." This was to distinguish him from the other Judas among the twelve apostles (Luke 6:16). One of the Hebrew words for "man" is *ish*. So "Iscariot" means "man of Kerioth." This was a village in Judea, and it appears that Judas was the only non-Galilean in the group of apostles. This may have created a barrier and contributed to his fall.

#### B. Making a Bargain: v. 15

Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests, who particularly hated Jesus after His cleansing of the temple, and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They counted out to him "thirty silver coins," perhaps worth twenty or twenty-five dollars—the price of a slave.

#### C. Watching for an Opportunity: v. 16

"From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over." This was now his main interest in life.

Why did Judas Iscariot do this? As we have already noted, John's Gospel reports Judas as saying: "Why wasn't

this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages" (12:5). But then John adds a very significant bit of information: "He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it" (v. 6).

Now we get a shocking picture of the situation. Judas felt cheated out of getting his hands on a truly sizable sum of money. The fact that this incident (Matthew 26:14-16) immediately follows the story of the anointing (vv. 6-13) suggests a connection. It would seem that Judas was so bothered thinking about the potential money that had escaped his grasp that he hit on the idea of selling Jesus to the chief priests. It is an awful commentary on those words, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Certainly this was the worst kind of evil the world has ever seen!

#### IV. THE LORD'S SUPPER:

Matthew 26:17-30

"On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread"—the day of the passover—the disciples asked Jesus, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the passover?" (v. 17). He sent Peter and John (Luke 22:8) into Jerusalem to prepare for Him and His disciples to eat the passover together that evening.

While "Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve" (v. 20), eating the passover meal, He made a shocking statement: "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me" (v. 21).

Filled with sadness, they said to Him, one by one, "Surely not I, Lord?" (v. 22). Even after Jesus' strong words in verses 23-24, Judas Iscariot said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" (v. 25). Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

It is difficult to understand how Judas could have failed to take the warning. We would have expected him to break down and repent with bitter tears. Instead, as John's account

suggests, he left the room and walked out into eternal "night."

With Judas gone, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (vv. 26-30). For Christ's followers this was to take the place of the Jewish passover.

#### V. JESUS IN GETHSEMANE:

Matthew 26:31-46

The Master went with His disciples to a place called "Gethsemane," which means "oil-press" (a press for squeezing oil out of olives). Leaving eight disciples at the entrance to the olive grove, He took with Him Peter, James, and John. To them He said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (v. 38). This they failed to do.

Jesus went a little farther, fell with His face to the ground, and prayed: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me; yet not as I will, but as you will" (v. 39). The cup He dreaded was separation from His Father's face when He would take our place on the cross as a condemned sinner. This was more than He felt He could bear. But He knew it was the price He must pay for our salvation. So He bowed His head in humble submission.

When He returned to His disciples, He found them sleeping. To boasting Peter He said, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" (v. 40).

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the real meaning of "alabaster giving"?
2. What "perfume" can we give to Jesus?
3. What acts of ours are most pleasing to Him?
4. Why was Mary more sensitive to Jesus' teaching?
5. What is the greatest memorial we can have?
6. Why did Judas betray Jesus?

Three times Jesus prayed the same prayer of submission to the Father's will (vv. 42, 44). When He returned the third time, He said to His three disciples, "Are you still sleeping and resting" (v. 45)—not "Sleep on now, and take your rest" (KJV). For immediately He added: "Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (v. 46). Exactly the same Greek words, in the same order, can be translated as a statement or a question. Only the question fits the context here. (The original Greek had no punctuation marks.)

## VI. ARREST OF JESUS:

Matthew 26:47-56

Even as Jesus said the words, Judas Iscariot arrived. "With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people" (v. 47).

Judas had arranged a signal: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him" (v. 48). Going at once to Jesus, he greeted Him as "Rabbi" and kissed Him (v. 49). What could have been more diabolical? It was the worst traitorous act in all history. In reply Jesus said, "Friend, do what you came for" (v. 50).

Immediately the men stepped forward, grabbed hold of Jesus, and arrested Him. But "one of Jesus' companions"—John (18:10) tells us it was Peter—drew his sword and "struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear" (v. 51). Probably Peter swung to cut off the man's head, but he "ducked" and only lost his ear!

Jesus told Peter to put the sword back in its scabbard, and added, "For all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (v. 52). Centuries of wars have documented this truth.

Christ said He could call on His Father and get "twelve legions of angels" (v. 53). (The Roman legion con-

sisted of six thousand soldiers.) But how then would the Scripture be fulfilled? (v. 54).

Reproving His captors (v. 55), Jesus yet submitted to arrest. "Then all the disciples deserted him and fled" (v. 56)—even Peter!

## VII. THE JEWISH TRIAL:

Matthew 26:57-68

"Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled" (v. 57), another meeting of the Sanhedrin. Peter has often been criticized because he "followed him at a distance" (v. 58). But we must give him credit for risking his life by following at all! If he hadn't come to the courtyard of the high priest, he would not have denied Jesus.

The purpose of the meeting is clearly stated: "The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death" (v. 59). After "many false witnesses" had failed (v. 60), finally two testified that Jesus said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days" (v. 61). What Jesus really said was, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). Jesus was referring to His body, but they misquoted Him and applied it to the temple in Jerusalem.

Finally the high priest charged Jesus under oath to tell if He was the Messiah, the Son of God (v. 63). When Jesus said, "Yes" (v. 64), the high priest tore his own clothes and cried, "He has spoken blasphemy!" (v. 65). Thereupon the Sanhedrin decreed, "He is worthy of death" (v. 66). But there was no excuse for their spitting in His face and striking Him with their fists (v. 67).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

In the beautiful consecration song, "Where He Leads Me," the second

verse repeats the refrain, "I'll go with Him through the garden." I used to

think that that meant the garden of prayer that we sing about: "I come to the garden alone."

But when I knelt for the first time in the Garden of Gethsemane on Christmas morning (Sunday), 1949, I could almost hear under the old, gnarled olive trees the words of Jesus from long ago: "My Father, if it is possible may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but

as you will." I bowed my head and wept. Ever since then those words have meant more to me.

Paul tells us that he was "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). But if we are going to be identified with Christ on the cross, we must first go through our personal Gethsemane, where we say, "Not as I will, but as you will."



April 12, 1981

## THEY CRUCIFIED HIM

DEVOTIONAL READING	Isaiah 53:7-12
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>They Crucified Him</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Jesus Gave His Life</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 21:1-13; 27:1-61 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 27:33-50 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>They were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"</i> Matthew 27:54
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Jesus Gave His Life</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 27:1-61; 21:1-13 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 27:27-31 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Christ loved me and gave himself for me.</i> Galatians 2:20
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>Apr. 6 M.:</b> They Praised Him. Matt 21:1-13 <b>Apr. 7 T.:</b> They Arrested Him. Matt. 26:47-56 <b>Apr. 8 W.:</b> They Tried Him. Matt. 27:1-2, 11-14 <b>Apr. 9 T.:</b> They Rejected Him. Matt. 27:15-25 <b>Apr. 10 F.:</b> They Mocked Him. Matt. 27:27-39 <b>Apr. 11 S.:</b> They Killed Him. Matt. 27:35-44 <b>Apr. 12 S.:</b> "He Makes Himself an Offering for Sin." Isa. 53:7-12
LESSON AIM	To help us understand better the meaning of Christ's crucifixion for us.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> April, A.D. 30 <b>Place:</b> Jerusalem
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>They Crucified Him</b> <b>I. The Triumphal Entry:</b> Matthew 21:1-11 <b>II. Jesus Before Pilate:</b> Matthew 27:11-26 A. Accusations of the Jewish Leaders: vv. 11-14 B. Pilate's Effort to Release Jesus: vv. 15-18 C. Warning from His Wife: v. 19 D. Choice of Barabbas: vv. 20-21 E. Demand for Jesus' Crucifixion: vv. 22-26

### III. Mockery of the Soldiers: Matthew 27:27-32

#### IV. The Crucifixion: Matthew 27:33-50

- A. Refusal of Drink: vv. 33-34
- B. Soldiers on Guard: vv. 35-36
- C. The Superscription: v. 37
- D. The Two Robbers: v. 38
- E. Insults of Passersby: vv. 39-40
- F. Mockery of Religious Leaders: vv. 41-43
- G. Attitude of Robbers: v. 44
- H. Cry of Dereliction: vv. 45-46
- I. Mistaken Interpretation: vv. 47-49
- J. Death of Jesus: v. 50

Between the lessons of last week and this week we have two events, both negative ones. The first was Peter's denials (26:69-75) and the second, Judas Iscariot's suicide (27:1-10). We want to look briefly at these.

Peter was sitting in the courtyard of the high priest when a servant girl said to him, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee" (26:69). Shaken and scared, Peter replied, "I don't know what you're talking about" (v. 70).

So he slipped out to the gateway. But there another girl saw him. This one said to the people standing by, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth" (v. 71). Still more afraid, Peter asserted under oath, "I don't know the man" (v. 72).

Now the ones standing by accused him: "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away" (v. 73). Peter's Galilean accent was his downfall. Once more he declared, "I don't know the man" (v. 74). The rooster crowed and Peter remembered Jesus' warning. He went out and wept bitterly.

When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, "he was seized with remorse" (27:3). He returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and confessed, "I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood" (v. 4).

The utter callousness of these religious leaders is shown in their reply: "What is that to us? That's your responsibility." Judas threw the money into the temple and went and hanged himself. And yet Judas had been with Jesus for about three years!

Jesus gave His life for me and for you. Have you given your life to Him? And are you willing to give your life for others?

Those are the questions that all of us, and especially young people, need to face. If Jesus was willing to give His life on the cross for us, how can we do less than give our lives to Him in gratitude. And if we really give our lives to Him, then as His followers we must give our lives for others in loving service, not as dead sacrifices, but as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). This is what God wants of us.

Do we feel sometimes that we are rejected, that we are

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

treated unfairly? Remember that no one in all history was treated so unfairly as Jesus was. We should be willing for His sake to take whatever comes, just as He suffered everything for us.

1. If we feel that some people don't like us, remember that some people *hated* Jesus.
2. Yet Jesus was willing to die for those who hated Him.
3. So we should be kind and forgiving to those who are unkind to us.
4. Jesus gave His life for us, and we should give our lives to Him.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY:

Matthew 21:1-11

Apparently this incident is included in today's lesson because of its contrast with the crucifixion. So we shall note it briefly.

It was the beginning of Passion Week. Jesus had just come up from Jericho. Now He was going to present himself publicly to the Jews in Jerusalem as their Messiah.

So He rode into the holy city on a donkey in fulfillment (v. 5) of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. The religious leaders should have quickly recognized that He was their Messiah, prophesied in their sacred Scriptures.

The crowds of passover pilgrims did. They shouted (v. 9):

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

The word *Hosanna* was equivalent to our modern expression, "God save the king!" And "the Son of David" was a messianic title. So the crowds welcomed their Messiah.

"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee'" (vv. 10-11). But the religious leaders in Jerusalem rejected Him.

### II. JESUS BEFORE PILATE:

Matthew 27:11-26

#### A. Accusations of the Jewish Leaders: vv. 11-14

"Jesus stood before the governor" [Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea] and the governor asked him "Are you the king of the Jews?" (v. 11, as in all three synoptic Gospels). Luke gives us the reason for this question. When Jesus was first brought before Pilate, the members of the Sanhedrin brought this accusation: "He . . . claims to be Christ, a king" (Luke 23:2). So it was natural that Pilate should ask Jesus if this accusation was true.

The answer of Jesus is difficult to translate. The literal Greek is "You say." It could possibly mean, "That's what *you* say," which would be non-committal, purposely ambiguous. That is the way Floyd Filson takes it. He paraphrases it this way: "I could truthfully use the title, but you give it a meaning I cannot accept, so I cannot give you a clear Yes" (*A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 289). That is, Pilate had in mind a political kingdom, Jesus a spiritual one. But the answer can also be translated positively: "It is as you say" (NASB), or even, "Yes, it is as you say" (NIV).

As the Jewish accusations continued, Jesus "gave no answer" (v. 12). So Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear how many things they are accusing you

of?" (v. 13). To the amazement of the governor, Jesus still made no reply (v. 14).

### B. Pilate's Effort to Release

Jesus: vv. 15-18

"Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd" (v. 15). It happened that "at that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas" (v. 16), which is Aramaic for "son of the father" (*Bar-Abba*). "The Jews would be conscious of the play on words, since this was exactly what Jesus claimed to be" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 116).

When the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked: "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" (v. 17). That he was eager to release Jesus is shown by the next statement: "For he knew that it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him" (v. 18).

### C. Warning from His Wife: v. 19

This incident is recorded only by Matthew. Pilate had left early to sit "on the judge's seat" (John 18:28), and apparently his wife had awoken later from a horrible dream. She sent her husband this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man." If only he had heeded her warning! (Men should listen to their wives!)

### D. Choice of Barabbas: vv. 20-21

While Pilate was cogitating on his wife's startling message, "the chief priests and the elders" were busy making the most of the opportunity. They "persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed" (v. 20).

Again the governor tried: "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" (v. 21). Without hesitation the crowd said, "Barabbas," who had committed murder in an insurrection against the government (Mark 15:7). Peter later reminded these same people: "You disowned the Holy and

Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you" (Acts 3:14). It was a horrible, fateful choice! But that is the choice that every person makes who rejects the Savior and chooses his own sin.

### E. Demand for Jesus'

Crucifixion: vv. 22-26

Pilate thereupon asked the haunting question: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" (v. 22). With one voice they cried, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked, "Why? What crime has he committed?" (v. 23). With the typical unreasonableness of a crowd (as one can see on television news almost any night) they did not answer his question but simply "shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him.'"

Pilate "saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting" (v. 24). This was what the Romans feared most of all. So he washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility!"

The answer of the people (v. 25) is horrible to contemplate: "Let his blood be on us and on our children." The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, forty years later, was part of the divine answer to this.

Then Pilate released Barabbas to them. "He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified" (v. 26).

"Pilate's washing his hands before the crowd (v. 24) is recorded only by Matthew. It did not cleanse his conscience, nor did it remove his guilt. His desire to placate the Jews by letting them have their way did him no good. Six years later he was summoned to Rome by the emperor to answer charges of misrule. Banished to Gaul, he is said to have committed suicide" (*WBC*, IV, 117).

Pilate stands condemned at the bar of history for his cowardly weakness. He allowed himself to be maneuvered into a corner by the scheming Sadducees, and he "caved in." He lacked the moral courage to do what he knew



was right and what was his responsibility as governor.

### III. MOCKERY OF THE SOLDIERS:

Matthew 27:27-32

"Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium [Greek *praetorium*, the official name for the governor's palace] and gathered the whole company [the Roman "cohort" of about six hundred men (the tenth part of a legion) of soldiers around him" (v. 27). They stripped off His clothes and "put a scarlet robe on him" (v. 28), the coat of a Roman legionnaire. Next they wove a crown of thorns and set it on His head. Then they put in his right hand a mock sceptre, knelt in front of Him and mocked Him with the cry, "Hail, King of the Jews" (v. 29). Not content with that, "They spit on him, and took the staff [the mock sceptre] and struck him on the head again and again" (v. 30), driving the cruel thorns into His forehead. Having satisfied their horrible sadism, they took off the scarlet robe, put His own clothes on Him, and "led him away to crucify him" (v. 31).

Weakened by the sleepless hours of the Last Supper, Gethsemane, the Jewish trial, the Roman trial and the cruel Roman scourging, Jesus was unable to carry His cross, so they forced Simon of Cyrene to take it (v. 32).

### IV. THE CRUCIFIXION:

Matthew 27:33-50

#### A. Refusal of Drink: vv. 33-34

"They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull)" (v. 33). The name is Aramaic. The Greek word for "skull" is *cranium*, from which we get *cranium*. Since the word is singular rather than plural, it probably does not refer to a place of execution but to a skull-shaped hill. Such is Gordon's Calvary, a skull-shaped rock north of the city wall near Jericho Road, between Herod's Gate and the Damascus Gate.

"There they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting

it, he refused to drink it" (v. 34). "This was intended as a narcotic to deaden the pain of hanging on the cross. Tradition says that the women of Jerusalem mercifully furnished this for crucified criminals. When Jesus tasted it and recognized what it was, He refused to drink it. He wanted to be fully conscious during these hours of suffering for sin" (*WBC*, IV, 118).

#### B. Soldiers On Guard: vv. 35-36

"When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots" (v. 35). These clothes "probably consisted of sandals, an under garment (short and sleeveless), a long white robe, a girdle, and the turban (head-dress)" (*WBC*, IV, 118).

In John 19:23-24 we have a more detailed account. In verse 23 we read: "When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom." It was an expensive garment, perhaps woven for Him with loving care by Mary Magdalene. When the soldiers saw this beautiful piece of clothing, they said: "Let's not tear it. Let's decide by lot who will get it" (v. 24). This explains the "casting lots" in Matthew's account.

"And sitting down, they kept watch over him there" (v. 36). As we have just seen, John's Gospel indicates that there were four soldiers on guard. This is what was called a quaternion, such as we find mentioned in Acts 12:4.

#### C. The Superscription: v. 37

"Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." The precise wording of this differs somewhat in the four Gospels, but John (19:30) tells us that it was written in Hebrew (Aramaic), Latin, and Greek. It is altogether possible that the exact form may have differed in the different languages. Mark (15:26) gives the shortest form: "THE KING OF THE JEWS."

This was the basic "charge" against Jesus. If we put all four accounts together we get the full statement: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

#### D. The Two Robbers: v. 38

"Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on his left." The Greek does not have *kleptai*, which means "thieves" (KJV), but *lestai*, which means "robbers." Furthermore, Josephus, the great Jewish historian of the first century, uses this word *lestai* for the Galilean insurrectionists who carried on guerrilla warfare against the government, seeking to assassinate Roman officials and collaborators.

Now we get the correct picture. In Mark 15:7 we read: "A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising." These two "robbers" on the outside crosses were obviously his henchmen, condemned to be crucified with him.

This makes the crucifixion scene all the more poignant. Clearly Barabbas was due to die on that middle cross, between his colleagues. Jesus died not only in our place, but specifically and literally in the place of one who was a murderer and an insurrectionist—a criminal of the criminals.

This also makes all the more unreasonable the action of the chief priests (Sadducees) in choosing the release of Barabbas. Ordinarily they were collaborators with the Roman government. They would have been the first to condemn Barabbas and to want him executed. But hatred of Jesus does strange, terrible things to people!

#### E. Insults of Passersby: vv. 39-40

"Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!'"

"What they could not perceive was

that He proved Himself the Son of God by *staying* on the cross. Divine love, not spectacular power, is the greatest demonstration of deity" (WBC, IV, 118).

#### F. Mockery of Religious Leaders: vv. 41-43

"In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders [the three groups in the Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem] mocked him" (v. 41). It was bad enough for them to accuse him falsely, condemn him to death, and demand His execution by Pilate. But the extreme, utter depravity of their hearts is shown by the fact that they mocked Him when He was suffering on the cross—for their sins!

The insulting language they used is unbelievable: "He saved others, but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (vv. 42-43).

When they said, "He saved others, but he can't save himself!" they spoke better than they knew. Jesus could not save Himself from the cross and still save others.

Their statement that they would believe in Him if He came down from the cross was, of course, sheer, unadulterated falsehood. Christ had given them abundant proof of His deity and messiahship. They had wilfully rejected Him, against all evidence, and they would not have repented and believed at this stage.

And what about verse 43? "The

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the purpose of Jesus' triumphal entry?
2. Why did Peter deny Jesus?
3. Why did Judas commit suicide?
4. Why did the chief priests and elders want to destroy Jesus?
5. How would you evaluate Pilate?
6. What impresses you most about the crucifixion?

scathing sting of the words in verse 43 also goes beyond the intellect and intention of these Jewish leaders. Since He claimed to be the Son of God, let God deliver Him if He wishes to have Him. The awful fact was that the Father had to turn His back on His beloved Son and forsake Him when He took man's place as a condemned sinner. This was the heart of the meaning of the Cross, but the religious leaders missed it entirely. To them Jesus was a blasphemous impostor, who deserved to die" (*WBC*, IV, 119).

#### G. Attitude of the Robbers: v. 44

In Luke 23:39-43 we are told that one of the robbers hurled insults at Jesus, but that the other one rebuked him, turned to Jesus in repentance, and was saved. How can we reconcile that with the statement here that "the robbers . . . heaped insults on him"? Evidently both suffering robbers reproached Christ at first. Then one of them was so impressed with Jesus' attitude toward those who mocked Him that he turned toward Him in repentance and faith.

#### H. Cry of Dereliction: vv. 45-46

From noon until three o'clock in the afternoon "darkness came over all the land" (v. 45). The Greek word for "land" is *ge* (gay), which also means "earth." But it is altogether probable that only the land of Palestine is meant, and possibly only the land of Judea. In the King James Version we find "land" here but "earth" in the parallel passage in Luke 23:44, where the Greek has the same word, an odd inconsistency.

Regarding the darkness I would note: "This could not have been caused

by an ordinary eclipse of the sun, for the moon is always full at the Passover season. . . . Probably a heavy, black cloud shut off the sun's light. Storm clouds were thought of as signs of divine judgment" (*WBC*, IV, 119).

Out of His dense inner as well as outer darkness Jesus cried out in Aramaic, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v. 46). It was the wail of a lost soul.

#### I. Mistaken Interpretation: vv. 47-49

Hearing the word *Eli*, some who were standing there said, "He's calling Elijah" (v. 27). One of them ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink (v. 48). But the rest said, "Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him" (v. 49).

It would seem that all this was done in mockery. For only the Jews would have known about Elijah. And they would have known that *El* means "God," and final *i* means "my"; so Jesus was saying, "My God," not "Elijah." It seemed that hollow, heinous mockery dogged Jesus all the way to the end.

#### J. Death of Jesus: v. 50

"And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit." It hardly needs to be said that "yielded up the ghost" (KJV) is not contemporary language. When the King James Version was made (1611) "ghost" was used for the spirit of either a live person or a dead person. Today it is used only for the latter. For that reason, even the use of "Holy Ghost" conveys the wrong impression to people of our time.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Since Jesus' cry of dereliction (v. 46) is of such importance in evangelism today, I want to quote what I have

written elsewhere: "This was the price He had to pay for man's salvation. The Incarnate Son of God took the torturous

trail of a lost soul, walking out into the labyrinthine depths of outer darkness. Hebrews 2:9 says that He tasted death for every man. For a few moments He experienced in His consciousness the unspeakable horror of eternal doom. The darkness that covered the land was

but a symbol of the deeper spiritual darkness that shrouded His soul. His cry of dereliction reveals the measure of His sacrifice. On the cross He paid the penalty for sin, which is separation from God" (*WBC*, IV, 119).



April 19, 1981

## VICTORY OF THE RESURRECTION

DEVOTIONAL READING	I Peter 1:3-9
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Because He Lives</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Christ Is Alive!</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 27:62—28:10</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 27:62—28:10</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>He is not here; for he has risen, as he said.</i> Matthew 28:6</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>The King Lives</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Matthew 27:62—28:10</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Matthew 28:1-8, 10</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>He is not here; for he has risen, as he said.</i> Matthew 28:6</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p><b>Apr. 13 M.:</b> The Burial of Jesus. Matt. 27:57-61</p> <p><b>Apr. 14 T.:</b> The Tomb Sealed and Guarded. Matt. 27:62-66</p> <p><b>Apr. 15 W.:</b> Vainly They Watched the Tomb. Matt. 28:1-4</p> <p><b>Apr. 16 T.:</b> "He Has Risen." Matt. 28:6-10</p> <p><b>Apr. 17 F.:</b> Sorrow Turned to Joy. John 20:11-18</p> <p><b>Apr. 18 S.:</b> "My Lord and My God." John 20:24-29</p> <p><b>Apr. 19 S.:</b> Resources for Victorious Living. I Peter 1:3-9</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us appreciate the meaning of Christ's resurrection for us.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> April, A.D. 30</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Jerusalem</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Victory of the Resurrection</b></p> <p><b>I. Posting of the Guard:</b> Matthew 27:62-66</p> <p>A. The Time: v. 62</p> <p>B. The Recollection: v. 63</p> <p>C. The Petition: v. 64</p> <p>D. The Consent: v. 65</p> <p>E. The Guard: v. 66</p> <p><b>II. The Resurrection:</b> Matthew 28:1-4</p> <p>A. The Two Marys: v. 1</p> <p>B. The Earthquake: v. 2</p>

C. The Angel's Appearance: v. 3

D. The Shaken Guards: v. 4

**III. The Announcement: Matthew 28:5-7**

A. The Comfort: v. 5

B. The Confirmation: v. 6

C. The Command: v. 7

**IV. The Meeting with Jesus: Matthew 28:8-10**

A. Fear and Joy: v. 8

B. Seeing Jesus: v. 9

C. Hearing His Words: v. 10

Only a dozen verses intervene between last week's and this week's lessons, so we will glance at them to fill the gap.

At the close of the last lesson (27:50), Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up His spirit. The next verse says, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (v. 51; also Mark 15:38). This symbolized that the way into the Holy of Holies (God's presence) was now open through Christ.

The rest of the material in verses 51-53 is found only in Matthew. "The earth shook and rocks split." The death of Jesus was an earth-shaking experience! "Tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection [Sunday morning] they went into the holy city and appeared to many people" (vv. 52-53). Presumably they later died and were buried again. They were a prophetic foregleam of our future resurrection.

The centurion in charge of the soldiers exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God" (v. 54). (See my extended discussion in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 120). Many women who "had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs" (v. 55) were watching all this.

Late that afternoon Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus and buried it in his own tomb. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were looking on (v. 61).

An oft-sung chorus today, popularized by Youth for Christ and the Billy Graham crusades, is "Because He Lives!" This is the message that young people everywhere need to hear.

Our topic today is "Christ Is Alive!" If that were not true, there would be no Christian religion. Worse still, we would have no salvation; we would still be lost in sin.

But Christ's resurrection means far more to us than deliverance from eternal punishment. It means that right here and now we can have Christ's living presence in our hearts and in our daily lives. "Because He lives I can face tomorrow," no matter what it brings.

Our general topic today is: "Victory of the Resurrection." It was not only Christ's victory over the sin of the world, but it is our victory over sin through Him.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Easter is more than eggs and bunnies.
2. They are simply symbols of abundant life.
3. Easter means that Christ is alive.
4. It also means that we can be alive spiritually in Him.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. POSTING OF THE GUARD: Matthew 27:62-66

#### A. The Time: v. 62

"The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests [who were Sadducees] and the Pharisees went to Pilate." These were probably official members of the Sanhedrin.

The Greek for "Preparation Day" is *paraskeue*. (The final *e* is pronounced *ay*.) This word was used for the preparation day before the Sabbath. It will be remembered that the Jewish Sabbath lasted from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. It is interesting to note that Friday is still called *Paraskeue* in Greece. This clearly indicates that the crucifixion was on Friday, since the "next day" was Saturday. We mention this because some writers in recent years have argued for a Wednesday crucifixion, since they can't find three days and three nights between Friday and Sunday. We will discuss this point further in connection with the verse that follows.

#### B. The Recollection: v. 63

The religious leaders said to Pilate: "Sir" (Greek, *kyrie*), "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'" Just how or when they had heard this we do not know, for in the Gospels the predictions of the resurrection were made by Jesus to His disciples. But somehow the word had reached these others.

On the use of "Sir" here Adam Clarke says, "The word *kyrie* is here very properly translated "Sir," which, in many other places is improperly

translated *Lord*" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 833).

As to the day of the crucifixion, I have written elsewhere: "This passage throws some light on the much debated question concerning how long Jesus was in the tomb. 'Three days and three nights' (12:40) 'sounds like seventy-two hours, which would obviously rule out a Friday crucifixion. It is claimed that 'after three days' (v. 63) also does. But the Jewish leaders asked that a guard be set 'until the third day' (v. 64). Assuming that this means beginning with Friday, the third day would be Sunday. The expression 'on the third day' is used seven times for the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 24:7, 21, 46; I Cor. 15:4). It seems clear that the Gospel writers used 'after three days' (twice) and 'on the third day' as equivalent. Since the latter occurs far more often and is more specific, it appears reasonable to take it as definitive, and thus to hold that Jesus died on Friday afternoon and rose Sunday morning" (*WBC*, IV, 121). As we have just noted, the use of *Paraskeue* in verse 62 almost demands this.

#### C. The Petition: v. 64

The chief priests and Pharisees asked Pilate to issue an order for making the tomb secure until the third day. "Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." The words "deception" here and "deceiver" (v. 63) are the same root in Greek, and this should be indicated in English (contra, KJV).

What were the first and last decep-

tions? The first, as these men saw it, was Jesus deceiving the people into accepting Him as Messiah. The last would be a supposed resurrection that would seem to prove His deity.

On the request of the religious leaders Clarke writes: "While these wicked men are fulfilling their own vicious counsels, they are subserving the great cause of Christianity. Everything depended on the resurrection of Christ. If it did not appear that He rose from the dead, then the whole system was false, and no atonement was made. It was necessary, therefore, that the chief priests should make use of every precaution to prevent an imposture, that the resurrection of Christ might have the fullest evidence to support it!" (*Commentary*, p. 833).

#### D. The Consent: v. 65

Pilate's answer was: "Take a guard. Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." Adam Clarke comments: "The Jews had a corps of Roman troops, consisting of several companies, as a guard for the Temple, Acts iv. 1. These companies mounted guard by turns; see Luke xxii. 4. Some of these companies, which were not then on duty, Pilate gave them leave to employ to watch the tomb" (*Commentary*, p. 833).

#### E. The Guard: v. 66

"So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." Clarke observes: "The guard was to take care that the disciples should not steal him away; and the seal, which was probably the seal of the governor, was to prevent the guards from being corrupted so as to permit the theft. So everything was done which human policy and prudence could do to prevent a resurrection, which these very precautions had the most direct tendency to authenticate and establish. How wonderful are the wisdom and goodness of God!" (*Commentary*, p. 833).

Only Matthew reports this posting

of the guard, as well as the later report of the guards (28:11-15). We can be grateful that he included it, for it strengthens our faith in the miracle of the resurrection of our Lord. The presence of the guard guaranteed a resurrection rather than a robbery of the grave.

## II. THE RESURRECTION:

### Matthew 28:1-4

#### A. The Two Marys: v. 1

"After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb." These are the same two women who are mentioned in 27:61 as sitting on Friday afternoon to watch the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea. They had to rest on the Sabbath day, in obedience to the law. But on Sunday morning they were on hand bright and early to see the tomb.

Mark apparently identifies the other Mary as "Mary the mother of James" (Mark 16:1; also Luke 24:10). Both Mark and Luke indicate that the women came to the tomb on Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body with spices they had brought.

There is considerable diversity in the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection. Each evangelist reports the things that impressed him most in the exciting happenings of that first Easter morning. It is only by putting the four accounts together that we get the full story.

#### B. The Earthquake: v. 2

This second earthquake, like the first (27:51-54), is recorded only by Matthew. It was caused by "an angel of the Lord," who "came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it." Some ancient paintings have pictured this as the exact time of Jesus' resurrection, as if the stone had to be rolled back so that He could escape the tomb. But He had already risen. The stone was rolled back



so that visitors could see the empty tomb and discover that Jesus' body was no longer there. Jesus' resurrection body could pass through the stone closing the entrance just as easily as that same evening it passed through locked doors into the midst of His disciples (John 20:19).

The "angel"—the Greek word *angelos* means "messenger"—was there as God's messenger to tell the saddened women that their Lord was alive. A loving God provided the message and the messenger.

### C. The Angel's Appearance: v. 3

"His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow." His face reflected the glory of the realm from which he had come—"heaven." Appropriately, His clothes were pure white. Adam Clarke makes this interesting, and perhaps appropriate observation: "He was clothed in garments emblematical of the glad tidings which he came to announce. It would have been inconsistent with the message he brought had the angel appeared in black robes, such as those preposterously wear who call themselves his successors in the ministry of a once suffering, but now risen and highly exalted, Saviour" (*Commentary*, p. 834).

I can remember when the only "holy" color was black. But suppose God had created the grass, the flowers, the

tree leaves, the ocean, the sky—all of them—black? The human race would probably have gone insane, sunk in hopeless depression.

### D. The Shaken Guards: v. 4

The chief priests, supported by Pilate, set a guard of soldiers in front of the sealed tomb. But it took only one angel to knock them out and open the tomb to view!

## III. THE ANNOUNCEMENT: Matthew 28:5-7

### A. The Comfort: v. 5

The effect on the godly, sorrowing women was quite different. To them the angel said, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified." This is similar to the Master's own approach to His startled disciples on those first two Sunday evenings when He appeared to them. In both cases His first words were, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:1, 26). And when God comes to sincere, devout souls today, it is always with the same message of comfort and peace.

### B. The Confirmation: v. 6

"He is not here: he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." The empty tomb was, and still remains, the proof of the resurrection.

### C. The Command: v. 7

The angel first said "Come" (v. 6). Now he says "Go". We all have to *come* first to the place of faith in the risen, redeeming Christ. Then we are to *go* and tell others. The confirmation must precede the command.

The angel said, "Go quickly and tell his disciples." The latter were still in the darkness of doubt. No light had yet shone in their hearts. Their Lord and Master was dead!

Luke, who shows in his Gospel a keen appreciation for the place of women, relates a pathetic point here.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were not the men on hand Sunday morning?
2. What place can women fill in the church today?
3. Do those in authority always have the greatest influence?
4. Why is "Mary" such a loved name still?
5. When does God speak in comfort to people?
6. What does the resurrection mean to you?

He tells us that the women went and told the apostles what the angel had said. What was their reaction? "They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense" (Luke 24:11). All we can say is, "Shame on the men!" The women were last at the cross and first at the tomb because they loved Jesus more than the men did. And this has too often been true throughout the history of the church.

The women were to tell the disciples to go to Galilee. There Jesus would meet them.

#### IV. THE MEETING WITH JESUS: Matthew 28:8-10

##### A. Fear and Joy: v. 8

"So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples." There was no hesitation or delay in carrying out the command to "go" and "tell." They "hurried" and "ran." The eagerness of women in serving the Lord very often puts men to shame!

On the feelings of the women Adam Clarke makes this comment: "*Fear* produced by the appearance of this glorious messenger of God, and *great joy* occasioned by the glad tidings of the resurrection of their Lord and Master" (*Commentary*, p. 834).

##### B. Seeing Jesus: v. 9

"Suddenly Jesus met them." What an unexpected surprise! Their "joy"

must have catapulted to the skies! It was more than they had expected or dreamed would happen.

His first word to them was *Kairete*—literally, "Rejoice!" or "Greetings" (NIV). "They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him." Their hearts must have been bursting with love and joy. They knew now, without any doubt, that He was really the Son of God, their divine Lord, for they "worshiped." No devout Jew would worship anyone but God.

##### C. Hearing His Words: v. 10

Jesus confirmed the words of the angel to the women: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." What a comfort it should have been to the disciples to be told that Jesus had called them "my brothers"!

The commands of verses 7 and 10 raise a bit of a problem. Were the disciples to leave immediately for Galilee?

We would suggest this solution: "This meeting of the disciples with their Master in Galilee is described in verses 16-20. But Mark, Luke, and John all tell of appearances of Jesus on the very day of the resurrection in or near Jerusalem. It seems evident that the earliest appearances took place in Judea, followed by two in Galilee (vv. 16-20 and 21), and finally by the concluding ones—on the Mount of Olives and at His ascension" (*WBC*, IV, 122).

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Why were women the first to see the risen Lord? We would agree with Adam Clarke when he writes: "These women deserved to be the first witnesses of the resurrection of Christ. During life they ministered to Him, and in death they were not divided. They attended Him to the Cross, notwithstanding their attachment to Him exposed them to the most imminent danger; and now they come to watch and weep at His

tomb. The common opinion is that women are more fickle and less courageous than men. The reverse of this I believe to be the truth in those who are thoroughly converted to God" (*Commentary*, p. 834).

Why do women want to be like men? Why step down from the high place God has given them as mothers, comforters, counselors, prayer leaders, and saints?

April 26, 1981

## IN MISSION WITH THE VICTOR

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

I Peter 1:13-25

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Into All the World*

**Youth Topic:** *Working with Christ*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 17:1-9; 28:11-20

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 28:11-20

**Memory Verse:** "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew 28:20

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Jesus Is with Us Always*

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 16:21-17:9; 28:11-20

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 28:16-20

**Memory Verse:** "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew 28:20

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Apr. 20 M.:** Three Disciples See Jesus' Glory. Matt. 17:1-12

**Apr. 21 T.:** The Transfiguration. Luke 9:28-36

**Apr. 22 W.:** The Great Commission. Matt. 28:16

**Apr. 23 T.:** The Heart of the Good News. Mark 12:28-34

**Apr. 24 F.:** Spreading False Reports. Matt. 28:11-15

**Apr. 25 S.:** A Promise of Help. John 14:8-21

**Apr. 26 S.:** "Be Holy... in All Your Conduct." I Peter 1:13-25

LESSON AIM

To help us see our mission to evangelize the world.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** A.D. 30

**Place:** Jerusalem and Galilee

LESSON OUTLINE

**In Mission With the Victor**

**I. The Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-9**

A. The Setting: v. 1

B. The Transfiguration: v. 2

C. The Heavenly Visitors: v. 3

D. Peter's Interjection: v. 4

E. The Voice from Heaven: v. 5

F. No One but Jesus: vv. 6-8

G. The Admonition: v. 9

**II. The Guards' Report: Matthew 28:11-15**

- A. Report to the Chief Priests: v. 11
- B. The Bribe: v. 12
- C. The False Explanation: v. 13
- D. The Promise of Security: v. 14
- E. The Popular Story: v. 15

**III. The Great Commission: Matthew 28:16-20**

- A. The Appointed Place: v. 16
- B. The Mixed Reaction: v. 17
- C. The Divine Authority: v. 18
- D. Make Disciples: v. 19
- E. The Promise of His Presence: v. 20

Most of our lives we have heard missionary speakers quote their favorite text: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15, KJV). But it would be better to quote the Great Commission of Jesus from Matthew 28:19-29.

Why? Because the two oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament—Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, the only ones from the fourth century—do not include Mark 16:19-20. What is more, Clement of Alexandria (second century) and Origen (third century) show no knowledge of the existence of these verses. Eusebius and Jerome, the leading Christian scholars of the fourth century, say that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them.

The last twelve verses of Mark's Gospel, as we are familiar with them, were apparently not in the original Gospel as written by Mark in the first century. So the honest, reasonable thing to do is to use the form of the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel, which is unquestionably genuine.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

Working with Christ is a grand privilege! He is our Lord, and He has commissioned us to make disciples for Him in all nations. We are to work *for Him*; but He has promised to work *with us*. Since we have that promise, we know that we can succeed.

How do we begin? Jesus gave the pattern in Acts 1:8, when He said that we should be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." So we should all begin in our "Jerusalem"—our home, our school, our job, our town. Some will branch out beyond this in a country-wide ministry. Still others will be called to foreign mission fields. But all of us are called and commissioned to witness where we are.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

1. Jesus is with us always when we obey Him.
2. His command is that we witness to others.
3. We should set the example of Christian living.
4. This will help to make our witness effective.

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE TRANSFIGURATION:

Matthew 17:1-9

#### A. The Setting: v. 1

We have already looked briefly at this incident (in the February 15 lesson). But now we want to study it in more detail.

The story of the transfiguration is found in all three synoptic Gospels (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). It was one of the high points in Jesus' life on earth.

Matthew and Mark begin by saying "After six days," while Luke says, "About eight days after." Only a carping critic would find a contradiction here. Obviously both expressions mean "a week later" than the previous incident, Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi.

Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John—the inner circle of apostles—and gave them the priceless privilege of viewing His transfiguration. This was one of three times when the same three disciples were alone with Jesus. The other two were at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37), and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37). These men had the highest opportunity and so the greatest responsibility.

Jesus "led them up a high mountain by themselves." The traditional Mount of Transfiguration, with its Church of the Transfiguration shown today to tourists, is Mount Tabor, at the eastern end of the Plain of Esdraelon. "But this is a rather low, rounding hill, only about one thousand feet high, and it apparently had a fortress on it at this time. So it does not seem to have been a fitting place for the Transfiguration. Therefore many scholars today think that this event took place on one of the spurs of lonely, lofty Mount Hermon, at the head of the Jordan Valley" (Ralph Earle, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, IV, 78). Mount Hermon has an elevation of almost ten thousand feet and is snowcapped even in the summer.

### B. The Transfiguration: v. 2

"There he was transfigured before them." The Greek verb *metamorphoo* occurs only four times in the New Testament. Besides the parallel passage it is found in Romans 12:2 and II Corinthians 3:18, where it is rendered "transformed" (NIV), describing our spiritual metamorphosis or transfiguration in Christ.

The rest of verse 3 describes the transfigured Jesus: "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." Luke tells us (9:29) that it was as Jesus was praying that this change took place. This suggests that we can be transfigured spiritually by prayer.

"While Christ was in close fellowship with His Father, His divine nature radiated an incandescent glow, which penetrated through the veil of His flesh, and the three disciples caught a glimpse of His eternal glory. It was a high moment in their experience and one to which Peter referred at the close of his life (II Pet. 1:16-18)" (WBC, IV, 78).

### C. The Heavenly Visitors: v. 3

"Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus." Moses represented the Law and Elijah the Prophets—the two main revelations of God to man. While Elijah did not write any of the prophetic books, he called the nation of Israel back to God during the kingdom period. Both Moses and Elijah had been on the mountain with God, and had been greatly used as a result. Elijah was finally transported to heaven alive, while the Lord buried Moses. These two men now came down from heaven to talk with Jesus about His coming "departure" from this life (Luke 9:31).

### D. Peter's Interjection: v. 4

"Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters

[booths of boughs]—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Poor Peter! "He did not know what to say" (Mark 9:6), so he, of course, said the wrong thing!

Why was it wrong? For two reasons. In the first place, suppose they had stayed there on the mount; what would have happened? There would have been no Calvary, no Book of Acts, no salvation for humanity.

"Peter's attitude is easily understood. People want to stay on the mount of vision, to enjoy the almost ecstatic state of glorious fellowship in the place of prayer. But at the foot of the mountain was a man in desperate need with a demonized son. And still today the multitudes wait at the foot of the mountain for the ministry of those who have glimpsed God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (*WBC*, IV, 78).

But there is a second way in which Peter spoke wrongly. I once read a book in Oriental philosophies that contained the oft-repeated expression: "Confucius, the Buddha, and the Christ"—putting them all on the same level (as the author intended). Peter bordered on this heresy in his closing words recorded at the end of verse 4.

### E. The Voice from Heaven: v. 5

"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them [like the ancient Shekinah in the tabernacle] and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased. Listen to him!" In other words, "Peter, you keep still! Instead of talking, and saying the wrong thing, you should be listening to my Son!"

It was a sharp rebuke to Peter. Jesus was not to be put on the same level with Moses and Elijah. God said, He is my "beloved Son," which can be translated "only Son." Jesus is the Son of God in an utterly unique way.

One of the great curses of Christendom has been that of giving human leaders, in actual practice, the same authority as Jesus Christ. That has happened thousands of times, with sad consequences!

### F. No One but Jesus: vv. 6-8

The voice from heaven struck the three disciples with terror, so that they fell face down on the ground (v. 6). But Jesus compassionately came and touched them (v. 7). He stilled their fears by saying, "Get up. Don't be afraid." His comforting presence set everything all right.

"When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus" (v. 8). "This was the permanent deposit, the real value of the vision. The test of any supposed ecstatic experience is whether it leaves one with inflated spiritual pride and fanatical dogmatism, or with a true humility based on a continuing consciousness of Christ's presence" (*WBC*, IV, 78).

### G. The Admonition: v. 9

"As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'"

Paul writes of Jesus Christ our Lord: "Who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). It was the resurrection that fully and finally validated the deity of Jesus to His wavering disciples. For the moment the transfiguration was a confirmation of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. But the resurrection would clinch it.

## II. THE GUARD'S REPORT:

Matthew 28:11-15

### A. A Report to the Chief Priests: v. 11

As Matthew is the only one who records the posting of the guards at the tomb, so he is the only one who tells of their report. Again we note that as a tax collector he was interested in the legal aspects of everything.

While the women who had just seen the risen Lord were hurrying to tell His disciples that He was indeed alive,

“some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.” The reference is to the things described in verses 2-4.

### B. The Bribe: v. 12

“When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money.” The chief priests apparently called at least an informal meeting of the Sanhedrin to deal with this alarming development. What the soldiers described sounded like a divine intervention—as indeed it was. If this word got out, all the people might believe in Jesus as the Messiah. If the chief priests had been honest and sincere, they would have acknowledged that Jesus was what He claimed to be. Instead they did the dishonest thing of bribing the guard.

### C. The False Explanation: v. 13

The chief priests bribed the guards to say, “His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.” This is just the opposite of what the guards had reported: It was an angel that had appeared, clothed with glory (vv. 2-3), not scared disciples.

It is hard to see how these religious leaders, who professed to worship the one true God and to be His main representatives on earth, could so utterly deny their faith by such brazen-faced lying to pagan soldiers. They had no respect for God, themselves, or their religion when they did this dastardly deed.

Yet religious leaders have done this many times since. Victor Hugo is reported as having said: “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” We have observed with our own eyes this horrible degeneration take place in personalities that were once kind and Christlike. Our only salvation as leaders in the church lies in genuine humility, in utter dependence on Christ, not on ourselves.

### D. The Promise of Security: v. 14

In the Roman regime these guards were guilty of a very serious crime. Death was the penalty for a sentry caught asleep while on duty. For the guards to say that while they were sleeping the disciples stole Jesus' body would ordinarily mean sealing their own execution.

Knowing how fearful the soldiers would be, the chief priests assured them: “If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” Talk about crooked politics—this was it!

### E. The Popular Story: v. 15

“So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.”

This is why Matthew records this incident. When he wrote his Gospel the story was making the rounds. But he knew what the true story was, and so he records it carefully for his readers.

It is no wonder that people turn away from religion when they know the hypocrisy of its leaders. What respect would these guards have for Judaism after this incident?

## III. THE GREAT COMMISSION: Matthew 28:16-20

### A. The Appointed Place: v. 16

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.” As we have noted, this was probably at least a week after the resurrection (see John 20:26).

The night before His crucifixion Jesus said to His disciples, “After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee” (26:32). But just what mountain it was that Jesus had designated we are not told.

### B. The Mixed Reaction: v. 17

“When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.” It is



common to mention Thomas at this point. But the record of Thomas doubting the first Sunday night and then believing the second Sunday night precludes this. The disciples could not have made the 150-mile round trip to Galilee in the intervening week, traveling on foot. "The various accounts suggest that Jesus' appearance was in some way different after His resurrection, for in several cases people fail to recognize Him at first (cf. John 20:15; Luke 24:16, 37). The exact nature of Christ's resurrection body is a matter of sheer speculation" (*WBC*, IV, 122).

Paul tells us that the resurrected Christ "appeared to more than five hundred brothers at the same time." If this was the same occasion as it very well may have been, then we would expect that there would be some who would doubt at first that it could be the one they had seen crucified at passover time in Jerusalem.

### C. The Divine Authority: v. 18

"Then Jesus came to them." This may suggest that the doubting occurred while Jesus was still at some distance. When He came near, the doubters may well have been convinced of His identity.

Now He said to them, "All authority"—not *dynamis*, "power" (KJV), but *exousia*, "authority"—"in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Romans 1:4, which we noted a few moments ago, says that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection. Now He could exercise the full authority of that position. The Father had given his authority to Him.

### D. Make Disciples: v. 19

The King James Version reads: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." But the verb is not the same in Greek as the one that is correctly translated "teaching" in verse 20. There it is *didasko*, which regularly means "teach." But here it is *matheteuo*, which comes from *mathetes*, "disciples." It means "make

disciples" (NIV). The same verb occurs in 27:57, where the King James Version correctly has, "who also himself was Jesus' disciple," or slightly more accurately, "who had himself become a disciple of Jesus" (NIV).

What does it mean to "make disciples"? To bring people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, so that they become disciples of Jesus, following and obeying Him.

Jesus added: "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is a sad commentary on human nature that too often more time and energy has been spent on debating the method of baptizing than on going out to "make disciples of all nations." We need to get our priorities straight! Baptism is an outward confession of an inward faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The *method* is not the important thing.

A more helpful point on which to concentrate here is the clear indication of the Trinity—"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We have noted before that the first clear, specific revelation of the Trinity is found at the baptism of Jesus, where as He came up out of the water the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove and the voice of the Father from heaven said, "This is my Son." So it is appropriate that those who

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can our lives be transformed?
2. Are we to always live on the mountain?
3. Where do we find the people in need?
4. How can we live a balanced life?
5. Whose authority do we have when we go and seek to make disciples?
6. How do we know that Jesus is with us?



come to follow Christ should be baptized with a Trinitarian formula.

But again we would emphasize that it is not the outward form but the inward faith that really counts. The most literal translation of the Greek would be "into the name of..." That is what counts.

### **E. The Promise of His Presence: v. 20**

There is a further instruction: "and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Too often new converts are baptized but not sufficiently instructed in how to live the Christian life—which means obeying all

that Christ has commanded. This is absolutely essential if we are going to build the church of Jesus Christ.

Then Jesus gave His disciples a beautiful promise: "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." In the Greek "always" is literally "all the days." There is no question that this expression primarily means "always." It is what we call the accusative of duration of time.

If we go in obedience to Christ's command, He will be with us "all the days"—the bad days as well as the good days, the hard days as well as the easy ones, the dark days as well as the bright ones. What a consolation this should be for all obedient Christians.

## **CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

Many people would like to claim the promise at the close of verse 20, without obeying the command of verse 19. But we have no right to do so. If we do not "go" where He leads us, we have no assurance of His presence.

The logic of this is inescapable. If

we go where Christ is going—in search of the lost—we are by His side. If we take the path of selfish enjoyment of our own desires, we have no justification for claiming or expecting His presence to be with us. But if we obey, He is there!

May 3, 1981

## GOD'S ULTIMATE WORD

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

John 10:1-10

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God's Ultimate Word*

**Youth Topic:** *Christ Reveals God to Us*

**Background Scripture:** Hebrews 1:1-2:9

**Scripture Lesson:** Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-8

**Memory Verse:** *In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.* Hebrews 1:1-2

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *A Letter from a Follower of Jesus*

**Background Scripture:** Hebrews 1:2

**Scripture Lesson:** Hebrews 1:1-3

**Memory Verse:** *God . . . has spoken to us by his Son.* Hebrews 1:2

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Apr. 27 M.:** The Eternal God. Heb. 1:10-14

**Apr. 28 T.:** God the Creator. Ps. 8

**Apr. 29 W.:** God's Word Becomes Flesh. John 1:1-5, 14-18

**Apr. 30 T.:** God's Son. Hebrews 1:5-9

**May 1 F.:** God Reveals Through His Spirit. I Cor. 2:6-13

**May 2 S.:** The Eternal Christ. Col. 1:15-23

**May 3 S.:** The Good Shepherd. John 10:1-11

LESSON AIM

To enforce the importance of accepting Jesus Christ as God's Ultimate Word to man.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** probably middle 60s of the first century

**Place:** uncertain (see Introduction)

LESSON OUTLINE

**God's Ultimate Word**

**I. God's Final Revelation to Man: Hebrews 1:1-4**

A. Previous Revelations: v. 1

B. The Final Revelation: v. 2

C. The Essential Nature of Christ: v. 3

D. Superior to Angels: v. 4

**II. The Better Messenger: Hebrews 1:5-14**

**III. Warning to Pay Attention: Hebrews 2:1-4**

- A. The Danger of Drifting: v. 1
- B. Punishment for Disobedience: v. 2
- C. No Escape: v. 3
- D. Testimonies to Salvation: v. 4

**IV. Supremacy of Christ: Hebrews 2:5-9**

- A. Angels Not Supreme: v. 5
- B. God's Care for Man: v. 6
- C. Lower Than Angels: v. 7a
- D. Over Creation: vv. 7b-8
- E. Jesus, Sovereign Savior: v. 9

The Book of Hebrews holds a unique place in the New Testament, since it does not fit into any of the main categories. We begin with the four Gospels and Acts which are followed by thirteen Epistles of Paul. Hebrews stands between these and the seven general Epistles. Then comes Revelation, the capstone of the sacred Scriptures.

The King James Version heading for the book reads: "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews." But the early Greek manuscripts have simply "To the Hebrews." Many popular Bible teachers assert the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. But probably no New Testament scholar, evangelical or otherwise, would do so. The best scholars in the early church did not. And certainly internal evidence is against it. The language of Hebrews is the closest to classical Greek of any book of the New Testament. The style and vocabulary are not Pauline. The main subject of Hebrews is Christ our High Priest. This idea is not found anywhere in Paul's Epistles.

The place of writing is uncertain. "Those from [so the Greek] Italy send you their greetings" (13:24), suggests that it was written to Rome. And Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) is the first to quote Hebrews extensively. Perhaps it was written in Palestine.

*Christ Reveals God to Us* is the central thrust of the New Testament. We cannot know God except through Jesus, and He said, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

The eternal Son of God came to earth and became the Son of man not only to die on the cross for us and pay the price of our salvation, but also to reveal the invisible God to us. Jesus declared, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). No one but Christ could say that and get away with it! Because He was God as well as man He made good His declaration.

Just as Jesus' claim survived the lofty Greek intellectualism of His day, so it still survives in our modern age of science. If we come sincerely to Him, we find God!

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Jesus has shown us what God is like.
2. When we know Jesus, we want to share Him with others.
3. God reveals Himself through Christian parents, ministers, and others.
4. But we must know Him personally.

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## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. GOD'S FINAL REVELATION TO MAN:

Hebrews 1:1-4

#### A. Previous Revelations: v. 1

The so-called Epistle to the Hebrews does not start like a letter. All the Epistles of Paul, as well as those of James, Peter, and Jude, begin with the name of the writer. Hebrews, as I John, begins like a treatise, not a letter. However, Hebrews does have an epistolary ending (13:22-25).

In the Greek text the first three words of the Book of Hebrews are *polymeros kai* ("and") *polytropos*. *Poly*, of course, means "many" (compare English use as a prefix). *Meros* means "a part," and *tropos* means "manner" or "way." Both compound words (found only here in the New Testament) are adverbs. So a good translation is "at many times and in various ways" (NIV) or, more literally, "in many parts and in many ways."

On the significance of these words Marcus Dods writes: "*Polymeros* points to the fragmentary character of former revelations. They were given piece-meal, bit by bit, part by part, as the people needed and were able to receive them. The revelation of God was essentially progressive; all was not disclosed at once, because all could not at once be understood. . . . His speaking was also *polytropos*, not in one stereotyped manner but in modes varying with the message, the messenger, and those to whom the word is sent. Sometimes, therefore God spoke by an institution, sometimes by parable,

sometimes in a psalm, sometimes in an act of righteous indignation." Dods goes on to say: "These features of previous revelations, so prominently set and expressed so grandiloquently, cannot have been meant to disparage them, rather to bring into view their affluence and pliability and many-sided application to the growing receptivity and varying needs of men. He wins his readers by suggesting the grandeur of past revelations") *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, IV, 247-48).

In a similar vein Adam Clarke says: "The words are . . . intended to point out the imperfect state of divine revelation under the Old Testament; it was not complete, nor can it without the New be considered a sufficiently ample discovery of the divine will. Under the Old Testament, revelations were made at various times, by various persons, in various laws and forms of teaching, with various degrees of clearness, under various shadows, types, and figures, and with various modes of revelation, such as by angels, visions, dreams, mental impressions. See Num. xxii. 6, 8. But under the New Testament all is done simply by one Person, i.e., Jesus, who has fulfilled the prophets and completed prophecy. One great object of the apostle is to put the simplicity of the Christian system in opposition to the complex nature of the Mosaic economy; and also to show that what the law could not do because it was weak through the flesh, Jesus has accomplished by the merit of His death and the energy of His Spirit" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 1248).



## B. The Final Revelation: v. 2

"But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son"—literally, "in a son." In contrast to all previous revelations, this is a *personal* revelation. It is God appearing in human flesh in the person of His Son.

All previous revelations were impersonal, and so were imperfect. Only a *personal* revelation of a person can be a *perfect* revelation. For persons cannot adequately be represented by *things*.

God's revelation of Himself in His Son had to be the *final* revelation. Why? Because God had only one Son! There can be no further revelation. That is why Joseph Smith was wrong. Divine written revelation, the Bible, had to end with the first century, while those who knew Jesus personally, or their close associates—for example, Luke the associate of Paul—were still living, to describe authentically the revelation that came in Christ. This is God's final revelation for us.

Christ is further described as the One whom God "appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." That is, the Son is the *end* of history (the "heir") and the *beginning* of history (the Creator). And for us, life begins and ends with Christ. Christ is described as Creator in John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16.

## C. The Essential Nature of Christ: v. 3

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." In Colossians 1:15 and 17 we find a close parallel to this: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. . . . He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

In the Colossian passage the Greek word for image is *eicon*, which the Greek Orthodox Church uses ("icon"). But in Hebrews "exact representation" ("express image," KJV) is *character*,

which has been taken over bodily into English. Marcus Dods says that this word "denoted the impress or mark made by the (en)graving tool, especially the mark upon a coin which determined its value; hence, any distinguishing mark, identifying a thing or person, *character*. . . . The mark left on wax or metal is the 'express image' of the seal or stamp. It is a reproduction of each characteristic feature of the original" (*EGT*, IV, 251). Christ is the exact representation of God's "being" (Greek *hypostasis*), His essential nature.

"Sustaining all things by his powerful word" is parallel to "In him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Christ is not only the Creator of the universe but also its Sustainer. There is no other adequate answer to our ongoing universe.

But there are two more important items in this verse: "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Marcus Dods comments on the first clause: "This was as essential to the formation of the covenant as the ability rightly to represent God's mind and will. This itself was the supreme revelation of God, and it was only after accomplishing this He could sit down at God's right hand as one who had finished the work of mediating the eternal covenant" (*EGT*, IV, 252).

Creation without redemption would not have been enough. By His death on the cross Christ brought in the new creation, His church.

Adam Clarke beautifully emphasizes the nature of these first three verses. He writes: "We can scarcely conceive anything more dignified than the opening of this Epistle. The sentiments are exceedingly elevated; and the language, harmony itself. The infinite God is at once produced to view, not in any of those attributes which are essential to the divine nature, but in the manifestations of His love to the world, by giving a revelation of His will relative to the salvation of mankind, and thus preparing the way, through a long

train of years, for the introduction of that most glorious Being, His own Son. This Son, in the fullness of time, was manifested in the flesh that He might complete all vision and prophecy, supply all that was wanting to perfect the great scheme of revelation for the instruction of the world, and then die to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. The description which he gives of this glorious personage is elevated beyond all comparison" (*Commentary*, p. 1248).

### D. Superior to Angels: v. 4

"So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." His name is "Son"; their name is "servant."

The main emphasis of the first two chapters of Hebrews is that Christ is superior to angels. The Jews were giving a great deal of emphasis to angels as the mediators of the covenant at Sinai. But Christ is vastly superior.

The Greek word *angelos* not only means "angel" but first of all "messenger." So in these first two chapters we have the better messenger. In chapter 3 Christ is greater than Moses, and so the better leader. In chapter 4 we have the better rest.

Then comes the central emphasis of this Epistle: Christ is the better high priest. This begins at 4:14 (where the chapter break should obviously be) and carries through chapter 7. Then we have the better covenant (c. 8), the better tabernacle (c. 9), the better sacrifice (c. 10), the better faith (c. 11), and the better life (cc. 12-13). The key emphasis of Hebrews is better things.

## II. THE BETTER MESSENGER:

### Hebrews 1:5-14

The word *angelos*, "angel" or "messenger," occurs eleven times in chapters 1 and 2. Furthermore, we find seven quotations from the Old Testament in the first chapter and four in the second. Most of these are from the Book

of Psalms, as a glance at the footnotes in the New International Version will show.

The first two quotations highlight the fact that God calls Christ "My Son" (v. 5). The third (v. 6) says that the angels are to "worship" Him. This shows that He is God, for only God is to be worshipped.

The fourth quotation (v. 7) says that God "makes his angels winds," carrying His message. In contrast, the fifth (vv. 8-9) has God saying to the Son, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever." In the sixth (vv. 10-12) the Son is addressed as "Lord," the name reserved for deity in the Old Testament, and He is acclaimed as the Creator. The seventh quotation, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (v. 13), was never addressed to angels.

The writer concludes: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (v. 14). They are servants, not the Son.

## III. WARNING TO PAY

### ATTENTION:

### Hebrews 2:1-4

#### A. The Danger of Drifting: v. 1

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." The King James Version says, "lest at any time we should let them slip." Origen (third century) uses the Greek verb here in the sense of "drift away." He writes, "The great mass of simple believers, who cannot keep every day as a divine festival, need sensible patterns in fixed holy days that they may not wholly drift away under popular influences from the observance of regular religious duties" (*Contra Celsus*, viii. 23). In other words, though every day should be kept sacred by our holy living, we should not neglect to keep especially sacred the Lord's Day each week, lest we drift away from spiritual things and all of life becomes secular.

## B. Punishment for Disobedience: v. 2

"For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment. . . ." The reference seems to be to the law, which was held to have been given, or mediated, by angels (see Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).

## C. No Escape: v. 3

"... how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" We should notice that it does not say "oppose" or "persecute," but simply "ignore" or "neglect." It might not seem such a crime to *neglect* it as it would be to *reject* it, but ultimately it is just as fatal. In both cases it means the eternal loss of our souls.

The expression "such a great salvation" deserves a word of comment. The salvation provided for us by Christ on the cross and wrought in our hearts by the Holy Spirit is : (1) great in cost; (2) great in coverage. It cost the precious blood of the sinless Son of God, shed on the cross for our sins. And it covers all who will believe in Jesus Christ—around the world, from every continent and every country, rich or poor, high or low, male or female. We should be grateful for such a great salvation!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How many items about Christ can you find in Hebrews 1:1-4?
2. Why is it essential that we believe in the deity of Jesus?
3. What is the place of angels in God's scheme?
4. In what ways is Christ better than the angels?
5. In what ways was He lower than the angels?
6. What was His greatest glory?

## D. Testimonies to Salvation: v. 4

"God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." In the Gospels we find all three terms—*signs*, *wonders*, *miracles*—used for the same things. We can best treat them in reverse order. The Greek word for "miracle" is *dynamis*, which literally means "power," a powerful work or a demonstration of divine power. That is basically what a miracle is.

Because such a supernatural work produced wonder as the result, the miracles are frequently referred to as "wonders."

But they were also "signs," signifying some great spiritual truth. That is why John, in his theological Gospel, regularly calls miracles *semeia*, signs.

The "gifts of the Holy Spirit" may be what are referred to in I Corinthians 12-14. Genuine gifts of the Spirit, actually given by Him, act as testimonies to God's great salvation.

## IV. SUPREMACY OF CHRIST: Hebrews 2:5-9

### A. Angels Not Supreme: v. 5

Some thought that "the world to come" the ideal world, would be governed by angels. Not so, says this writer. The sequel in the following verses indicates that Jesus will rule.

### B. God's Care for Man: v. 6

The primary reference of this verse is to man as man. "The son of man" is a typical Hebraism for "man." Why should God be concerned about man?

### C. Lower Than Angels: v. 7a

"You made him a little lower than the angels." The Hebrew original, in Psalm 8:4-6, is *Elohim*, the most common word for "God" in the Old Testament. But *Elohim* is a plural word (*im*

is the masculine plural ending of Hebrew words) used for pagan "gods." Here it is interpreted as meaning "angels." As man, Christ was for a little time lower than the angels.

#### D. Over Creation: vv. 7b-8

These words can be applied in a measure to man, whom God set over His creation (Gen. 1:26-28). But its higher application, as the context shows, is to Christ. "Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him" (v. 8b) could be applied to man, who has not attained supremacy over many elements of the creation. But the next verse suggests that the final reference is to Christ.

#### E. Jesus, Sovereign Savior: v. 9

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels [in His incarnation] now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." This expresses a beautiful truth: What seemed to be His greatest degradation and disgrace—dying as a condemned criminal on the cross (crucifixion was for slaves and criminals)—actually became His greatest glory. Jesus is "crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death." This is altogether just and reasonable, for His death on Calvary was the greatest display of divine love the world has ever seen.

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### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The Book of Hebrews is full of warnings, and one of the most significant ones is against the danger of drifting (2:1).

Drifting is doubly dangerous: (1) because it is too often an unconscious situation (the person doesn't realize he is drifting); (2) because it is so comfortable. A person who is drifting

downstream in a boat could be asleep, oblivious of what is happening. There is no apparent motion of the water, or of the boat in the water. But if this drifting happens to be on the Niagara River just above the falls, it could be the most dangerous experience imaginable. We can't afford to drift!



May 10, 1981

## PIONEER OF OUR SALVATION

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

John 6:35-41, 44-45

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *The Pioneering Spirit*

**Youth Topic:** *Pioneer of Your Salvation*

**Background Scripture:** Hebrews 2:10—4:13

**Scripture Lesson:** Hebrews 2:10-18

**Memory Verse:** *Because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.* Hebrews 2:18

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *We Can Trust God*

**Background Scripture:** Hebrews 11; 13; Matthew 6:25-34a; Mark 4:35-40

**Scripture Lesson:** Hebrews 11:1-3; 13:6a; Mark 4:35-40

**Memory Verse:** *We can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper."* Hebrews 13:6

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

May 4 M.: Sending of the Son. John 3:16-21

May 5 T.: Salvation Through Jesus Christ. II Tim. 2:8-13

May 6 W.: Salvation Is at Hand. Ps. 85:7-13

May 7 T.: The Day of Salvation. II Cor. 6:1-10

May 8 F.: No Longer Strangers. Eph. 3:11-22

May 9 S.: Salvation Belongs to the Lamb. Rev. 7:9-11

May 10 S.: "I Am the Bread of Life." John 6:35-41, 44-45

LESSON AIM

To help us appreciate more fully Christ's sufferings for us.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** middle 60s of the first century

**Place:** uncertain

LESSON OUTLINE

**Pioneer of Our Salvation**

**I. The Divine-human Savior:** Hebrews 2:10-13

A. Made Perfect Through Suffering: v. 10

B. One Family: v. 11

C. Singing His Praises: v. 12

D. Trusting In Him: v. 13

**II. His Incarnation:** Hebrews 2:14-18

A. Purpose of the Incarnation: vv. 14-15

B. Helping His People: v. 16

C. A Merciful and Faithful High Priest: v. 17

D. Helping the Tempted: v. 18

### III. Warning Against Unbelief: Hebrews 3:7-19

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

Our topic today is "The Pioneering Spirit." Moses had it. If he hadn't he could never have led the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Sinai Desert. It was a colossal task and called for great energy and perseverance. Christ also had the pioneering spirit. He undertook and accomplished what no one else has ever done—obtaining salvation for the human race.

Pioneering is costly, difficult work. For Jesus it was the most costly thing ever done on earth. He met not simply physical death, but separation from His Father, with whom He had lived in eternal fellowship.

We, too, should have a pioneering spirit in the work of the Lord. We should be willing to endure hardship in order that salvation may come to others.

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation. He has blazed the trail that we are to follow. He has opened up for us a way in the wilderness of modern living. If we are willing to follow Him, we will never lose the way.

As we listen to the news on radio and television we get the impression that the leaders of this world have lost their way and are fumbling in the dark—groping but not getting anywhere.

In the midst of such a depressing, frustrating situation we can find a sure way of life in Jesus Christ. Let's commit our lives to Him and let Him lead us safely through!

#### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. We can trust God; He will not let us down.
2. Just as Jesus calmed the fear of the disciples, so He will calm our fears.
3. If God cares for the birds, He will care for us.
4. Faith in God can take us through hardships.

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## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE DIVINE-HUMAN SAVIOR: Hebrews 2:10-13

#### A. Made Perfect Through Suffering: v. 10

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." James

Moffatt writes, "Here we might say, the idea is that it would not have done for God to save men by a method which stopped short of suffering and actual death" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 29).

Moffatt also says that the point in adding "for whom and through whom everything exists" is that "the sufferings and death of Jesus are not acciden-

tal; they form part of the eternal world-purpose of God" (p. 30).

Which is better, the traditional "pioneer," or "author" (NASB, NIV)? The Greek word is *archegos*. Joseph H. Thayer says that it means "one that takes the lead in anything and thus affords an example," but for this passage he suggests "author" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 77). W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich agree basically when they recommend "originator, founder" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 112). James Moffatt says: "The general idea in *archegon* (accusative case) is that of originator or personal source. . . . It is doubtful how far the writer was determined, in choosing the term, by its varied associations, but the context, like that of 12:2, suggests that the 'pioneer' meaning was present to his mind; Jesus was *archegos tes soterias auton* ('author of our salvation') in the sense that he led the way, broke open the road for those who followed him" (*Commentary*, p. 31). Either "pioneer" or "author" (in the sense of originator) fits very well.

Christ was made "perfect through suffering," the writer of Hebrews tells us. In what sense should we take "perfect"?

Again Moffatt gives a helpful observation: "Hence, to 'perfect' . . . is to make him adequate, completely effective" (pp. 31-32). This is surely the minimum meaning. But does it also suggest perfection of character—that is, in His incarnation? Why not both? Marcus Dods puts it very well when he says that "here the word *directly* denotes making perfect as leader of salvation, but *indirectly* and by implication making morally perfect" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, IV, 265).

This is a great mystery, one that is developed more forcefully here in Hebrews than anywhere else in the New Testament. In His humanity, as a necessary prelude to His becoming the perfect sacrifice for our sins, He had to have a development of perfect character

(see Luke 2:52). And suffering is an essential part of character development.

### B. One Family: v. 11

"Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family," or "all from one *Father*" (NASB). They both have the same Father, God.

The verb "makes holy" is *hagiazō*. *Hagios* is the Greek adjective meaning "holy," and the "z" (zeta) has the causative force of "make." So "make holy" is the literal meaning of *hagiazō*. In the Old Testament the main emphasis seems to be on the ceremonial aspect: "set apart to God." But in the New Testament the moral thrust becomes dominant: those who are set apart to God must be holy in order to have fellowship with a holy God.

Since both the Redeemer and the redeemed have the same Father, are of the same family, "Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers." What a privilege and high status are ours!

On this verse Moffatt comments: "The writer now works out the idea suggested by 'many sons.' Since Jesus and Christians have the same spiritual origin, since they too in their own way are 'sons' of God, he is proud to call them brothers and to share their lot (vv. 11-13). The leader and his company are a unit, members of one family of God" (*Commentary*, p. 32).

### C. Singing His Praises: v. 12

The quotation is from Psalm 22:22. Adam Clarke writes: "The apostle certainly quotes this psalm as referring to Jesus Christ, and these words as spoken by Christ unto the Father, in reference to His incarnation; as if He had said: 'When I shall be incarnated, I will declare thy perfections to mankind; and among My disciples I will give glory to Thee for Thy mercy to the children of men! . . . Nor were the perfections of God ever properly known or declared

till the manifestation of Christ" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 1251).

#### D. Trusting in Him: v. 13

In the notes of both the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version this verse is attributed to Isaiah 8:17. In the King James Version margin it is assigned to II Samuel 22:3. Adam Clarke observes: "It is not clear to what express place of Scripture the apostle refers. Words to this effect frequently occur, but the place most probably is Ps. xviii. 2, several parts of which psalm seem to belong to the Messiah." The second quotation is clearly from Isaiah 8:18. Clarke goes on to say: "The apostle does not intend to say that the portions which he has quoted have any particular reference, taken by themselves, to the subject in question. They are only catchwords of whole paragraphs, which, taken together, are full to the point; because they are prophecies of the Messiah, and are fulfilled in Him. This is evident from the last quotation: 'Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel.' Jesus and His disciples wrought a multitude of the most stupendous signs and wonders in Israel. The expression may also include all genuine Christians; they are for signs and wonders throughout the earth" (*Commentary*, pp. 1251-52).

Taken together, these three quotations emphasize the humanity of Jesus, which was just as real as His deity. Other human beings were His brothers. In His humanity He had to put His trust in God, and He served in ready obedience to the Father's will.

## II. HIS INCARNATION:

### Hebrews 2:14-18

#### A. Purpose of the Incarnation: vv. 14-15

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity

so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

This gives us the reason for and purpose of the incarnation. Only by this means could Christ die on the cross and by so doing destroy Satan and free those who had been his slaves.

Adam Clarke covers the ground well when he writes: "Since those children of God who have fallen and are to be redeemed are human beings, in order to be qualified to redeem them by suffering and dying in their stead, *He also himself likewise took part of the same*—He became incarnate. By the *children* here we are to understand, not only the disciples and all genuine Christians, as in v. 13, but also the whole human race, all Jews and all Gentiles. *That through death.* That by the merit of His own death, making atonement for sin, and procuring the almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, He might 'counterwork' or 'render useless and ineffective' all the operations of him who had the *power* or 'influence' to bring death into the world; so that *death*, which was intended by him who was a murderer from the beginning to be the final ruin of mankind, becomes the instrument of their exaltation and endless glory; and thus the death brought in by Satan is counterworked and rendered ineffectual by the death of Christ" (*Commentary*, p. 1252).

#### B. Helping His People: v. 16

The King James Version reads, "For verily he took not on *him* the nature of angels; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham." The verb in both clauses is *epilambanetai*, the basic meaning of which is "take hold of." But Arndt and Gingrich give for this passage: "be concerned with, take an interest in," or possibly "help" (*Lexicon*, p. 295). Henry Alford notes that it sometimes meant "to take by the hand, in order to help or lead." He comments



that verse 16 is "exegetical of ver. 15, by pointing out a fact well known to us all, that it was to help a race subject to death, that Christ came" (*The Greek Testament*, IV, 51).

It is generally agreed today that the correct translation is: "For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the seed of Abraham" (NASB), or "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" (NIV). The Jews were the first to receive Christ's help.

### C. A Merciful and Faithful High Priest: v. 17

"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way [that is, have a true humanity] in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." He had to become one of us, and live as we live in order that He would be a "merciful" High Priest, knowing how weak we are in our human flesh, and also a "faithful" High Priest, knowing how much we need His help. What a comforting thought!

This is the first mention in this Epistle of Christ as our High Priest. As we have already noted, this becomes the central emphasis of Hebrews 4:14—8:6. It is a beautiful concept and one that should thrill the heart of every Christian. Christ not only acted as our High Priest when He offered His own blood as an atonement for our sins, as the high

priest offered animal blood on the annual day of atonement, but He also serves as our High Priest every day. This is emphasized in verse 18, as we shall now see.

### D. Helping the Tempted: v. 18

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." He knows just how we feel when we are tempted.

The verb translated "help" here is significant. It is *boetheo*, which comes from *boe*, a "cry" or "shout." So it basically means "come at a cry for help" or "come to the aid of." That is what Christ does for us. Because He knows how much we need Him, He comes quickly when He hears our cry for help.

Moffatt comments on this verse: "He suffered by his temptations, the temptations specially in view being temptations to avoid the suffering that led to the cross. This is the situation of the readers. They are in danger of slipping into apostasy, of giving up their faith on account of the hardships which it involved. 'Those being tempted' are people tempted to flinch and falter under the pressure of suffering. Life is hard for them, and faith is as hard if not harder. Courage, the writer cries, Jesus understands; he has been through it all, he knows how hard it is to bear suffering without being deflected from the will of God" (*Hebrews*, p. 39).

Moffatt also gives a good summary of verses 10–18, which we quote in part: "The writer now explains why Jesus had to suffer and to die. Only thus he could save his brother, men who lay . . . under the tyranny of death. To die for everyone meant that Jesus had to enter human life and identify himself with men; suffering is the badge and lot of the race, and a Saviour must be a sufferer, if he is to carry out God's saving purpose. The sufferings of Jesus were neither an arbitrary nor a degrading experience, but natural, in view of what he was to God and men alike. For the first time, the conception of suffering occurs, and the situation which gave

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is suffering essential to character development?
2. What does the humanity of Jesus mean to us?
3. What did it mean to Jesus?
4. How are we "brothers" of Jesus?
5. How did Jesus meet temptation?
6. What does He do for us as our High Priest?

rise to the author's handling of the subject arose out of what he felt to be his readers' attitude. 'We are suffering hardship on account of our religion.' But so did Jesus, the writer replies. . . . Suffering made Jesus a real Saviour; it enabled him to offer his perfect sacrifice. . . . He suffered not only for you but like you, undergoing the same temptations to faith and loyalty as you have to meet" (*Hebrews*, p. 28).

### III. WARNING AGAINST UNBELIEF: *Hebrews* 3:7-19

Verses 7-11 are a quotation from Psalm 95:7-11. The way this quotation is introduced is very significant: "as the Holy Spirit says." This is a forthright assertion of the divine inspiration of this psalm that was written long ago.

The words quoted contain a strong warning against hardening one's heart. That is what the ancient Israelites did in the Sinai Desert, and a whole generation perished there because of rebellion against God's will.

Then the writer of this Epistle focuses his attention on his readers: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (v. 12)—as the Israelites had. "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (v. 13).

Then comes a very important statement: "We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first" (v. 14). We must hold on firmly to the end if we are going to be finally saved.

Once more the writer of *Hebrews* underscores the example of the Israelites. They had a truly miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage—a symbol of the slavery of sin. They were promised the Land of Canaan. But because of their disobedience in the desert, they were rejected and did not enter the Promised Land. Instead, their bodies "fell in the desert" (v. 17). Unbelief, which showed itself in disobedience, caused them to perish. It is a solemn warning to us today.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Some years ago a Protestant minister was in the hospital, suffering severe pain with an unusual ailment. Friends and fellow ministers came to visit him, but he said that the greatest comfort he received was from a Roman Catholic priest. Why?

The priest sat down beside his bed,

looked at him compassionately, and said: "I know exactly how you feel, for I suffered with the same affliction that you have."

Jesus is able to comfort and sustain us because He suffered in temptation as we do. This enables Him to give us the help we need.

May 17, 1981

## OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

John 14:15-24

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Our Great High Priest*

**Youth Topic:** *Christ, Your Great High Priest*

**Background Scripture:** Hebrews 4:14—7:28

**Scripture Lesson:** Hebrews 4:14—5:10

**Memory Verse:** *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Hebrews 4:16

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Noah, A Man of Faith*

**Background Scripture:** Hebrews 11; Genesis 7:1—8:19

**Scripture Lesson:** Hebrews 11:7a

**Memory Verse:** *My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.* Psalm 121:2

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

May 11 M.: The Source of Eternal Salvation. Heb. 5:7-14

May 12 T.: Offer Right Sacrifices. Ps. 4

May 13 W.: Offer Spiritual Sacrifices. I Peter 2:1-10

May 14 T.: A Living Sacrifice. Rom. 12:1-8

May 15 F.: The Sacrificial Love. John 15:12-17

May 16 S.: The Priest Who Offered Himself. Heb. 7:23-28

May 17 S.: The Spirit of Truth. John 14:15-24

LESSON AIM

To help us appreciate Christ as our great High Priest.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** middle 60s of the first century

**Place:** uncertain

LESSON OUTLINE

### Our Great High Priest

#### I. A Great High Priest: Hebrews 4:14-16

A. Jesus the Son of God: v. 14

B. A Sympathetic High Priest: v. 15

C. Help for Every Need: v. 16

#### II. A Human High Priest: Hebrews 5:1-4

A. Representing Man to God: v. 1

B. Subject to Weakness: v. 2

C. Sacrificing for His Own Sins: v. 3

D. Called by God: v. 4

**III. The Divine High Priest: Hebrews 5:5-6**

- A. God's Son: v. 5
- B. A Priest Forever: v. 6

**IV. Jesus' Life on Earth: Hebrews 5:7-10**

- A. Loud Cries and Tears: v. 7
- B. Learning Obedience: v. 8
- C. Source of Salvation: v. 9
- D. In the Order of Melchizedek: v. 10

We have studied about the better messenger (Jesus better than angels) in chapters 1 and 2, and the better leader (Jesus better than Moses) in chapter 3. Now we want to look a moment at the better rest (Jesus better than Joshua) in chapter 4 (vv. 1-13).

The author of Hebrews begins chapter 4 with an exhortation. "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it" (v. 1). Most of the warnings in Hebrews are against failing to go all the way with Christ. This is understandable when we realize that Hebrews, as its name indicates, is written to Jewish Christians.

The Greek noun for "rest" in verses 1, 3 (twice), 5, 10, and 11 is *katapausis*—literally, a "cessation" or "stopping." Verse 10 describes it fittingly: "For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work." We enter God's rest when we stop wanting our own way, and let Him have His way.

One word in verse 8 deserves attention. The King James Version has "Jesus." The Greek does have *Iesous*, but that is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua," which is clearly meant here. All recent versions of the Bible correctly have "Joshua." The statement that "Jesus" did not give them rest (KJV) is untrue!

Christ is your great High Priest! What was the function of a high priest in the Old Testament? He was to represent God to the people and the people to God. And that is what Christ does for us.

The supreme function of the high priest in Israel was that of going alone into the Holy of Holies on the annual day of atonement (*Yom Kippur*) and sprinkling on the mercy seat the blood of the sin offering to atone for the sins of all the people. This Jesus did with His own blood at Calvary, once for all (Hebrews 9:12).

But Jesus is also our great High Priest day by day as He makes intercession to the Father for us (1 John 2:1-2). So we come confidently in prayer, knowing that He represents us to the Father.

1. Noah's faith is an example to all of us.
2. He believed God when no one else did.
3. We have many people to help us in our faith.
4. There is no excuse for our failing to believe.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. A GREAT HIGH PRIEST: Hebrews 4:14-16

#### A. Jesus the Son of God: v. 14

The writer reminds his readers that “we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.” Marcus Dods suggests that the adjective “great” is “explained and justified by two features of this Priest: (1) He has passed through the heavens and entered thus the very presence of God. . . . As the Aaronic High Priest passed through the veil, or . . . through the various fore courts, into the Holiest place, so this great High Priest had passed through the heavens and appeared among eternal realities. So that the very absence of the High Priest which depressed them, was itself fitted to strengthen faith. He was absent, because He was dealing with almighty God in their behalf. (2) The second mark of His greatness is indicated in His designation, ‘Jesus the Son of God,’ the human name suggesting perfect understanding and sympathy, the Divine Sonship acceptance with the Father pre-eminent dignity” (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, IV, 283).

“Jesus the Son of God” is a beautiful expression. It occurs only here in the New Testament in this exact form. It strikingly combines the human and the divine—unique combination, found only in Christ. On the basis of this, the writer admonishes his Hebrew converts to Christianity, “let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.” Judaism had no such high priest to offer.

#### B. A Sympathetic High Priest: v. 15

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”

Adam Clarke comments: “To the objection, ‘Your High Priest, if entered

into the heavens, can have no participation with you, and no sympathy for you, because out of the reach of human feelings and infirmities,’ he answers, ‘We have not a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness.’ Though He be the Son of God and equal in His divine nature with God, yet, having partaken of human nature, and having submitted to all its trials and distresses, and being *in all points tempted like as we are . . . without feeling or consenting to sin*, He is able to succor them that are tempted” (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 1256).

The very last part of the verse, “Yet was without sin,” is literally “apart from sin.” Most commentators and translators take this as meaning “without sinning.” And this may well have been the main emphasis that the writer intended. But it could possibly be taken as “apart from any sinful nature within.” Adam Clarke suggests both interpretations: “without feeling or consenting to sin.” Perhaps we should allow both meanings, while agreeing that “without sinning” fits the writer’s argument a bit better.

“Sympathize” (NASB, NIV) is very close to the Greek word here, *sympathesai*. And we should remember that “sympathize” means “suffer with,” as the Greek word indicates.

#### C. Help for Every Need: v. 16

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Since we have such a sympathetic High Priest sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven, ready to plead our case for us, we should come with boldness and confidence to the throne of grace. There we will receive “mercy”—pardon for all our sins—and “grace”—ample assistance for all our needs.

“In our time of need” is literally “for timely help.” Marcus Dods remarks:

"Assistance in hours of temptation must be timely or it is useless." He also gives this good quotation from Bishop Wilson: "The most dangerous of all temptations is to believe that one can avoid or overcome them by our own strength, and without asking the help of God" (*EGT*, IV, 285).

James Moffatt makes this observation: "The 'sympathy' of Jesus is shown by practical aid to the tempted, which is suitable to their situation, suitable above all because it is timely" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 60).

## II. A HUMAN HIGH PRIEST:

### Hebrews 5:1-4

#### A. Representing Man to God: v. 1

"Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

Dods relates this to the two preceding verses. He says: "The connection is: Come boldly to the throne of grace; let not sin daunt you, for every high priest is appointed for the very purpose of offering sacrifices for sin" (*EGT*, IV, 285).

The high priest in Israel brought two kinds of offerings. The first were "gifts," which expressed the gratitude of the people to their God who generously supplied them with everything good. The second were "sacrifices for sin." In the Mosaic law there were two different parts to the latter: the so-called "trespass offering" and the "sin offering." The latter dealt with more serious matters. And both of these were animal sacrifices, for without the shedding of blood there was no atonement for sin.

#### B. Subject to Weakness: v. 2

Speaking of the human high priest, the writer of Hebrews says, "He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness." Likewise

pastors and Christian workers today, knowing their own weaknesses, should deal gently with others.

The Greek verb translated "deal gently" is *metriopatheo*, found only here in the New Testament. James Moffatt says that here "it denotes gentleness and forbearance, the moderation of anger in a person who is provoked and indignant" (*Hebrews*, p. 62).

Marcus Dods writes: "If the priest is cordially to plead with God for the sinner, he must bridle his natural disgust at the loathsomeness of sensuality, his impatience at the frequently recurring fall, his hopeless alienation from the hypocrite and the superficial, his indignation at any confession he hears from the penitent" (*EGT*, IV, 286).

This is a needed admonition for us today. If we are disgusted with sinners or harsh toward them, we cannot help them.

#### C. Sacrificing for His Own Sins: v. 3

The writer is drawing the sharp contrast between the human high priest and the heavenly High Priest. Jesus had no sins for which sacrifice had to be made. Not so the high priest in Israel. "He has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people." In the regulations for the day of atonement it is specifically stated that Aaron was to offer a bull "for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household" (Lev. 16:6). Our great High Priest had never sinned.

#### D. Called by God: v. 4

"No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was." Dods comments: "An additional reason for trusting in the priest is that he has not assumed the office to gratify his own ambition but to serve God's purpose of restoring men to His fellowship. All genuine priesthood is the carrying out of God's will" (*EGT*, IV, 287).

In modern times some young men

have been encouraged to choose the ministry as an honorable vocation. But no one has a right to be in the ministry unless God has called him.

### III. THE DIVINE HIGH PRIEST: Hebrews 5:5-6

#### A. God's Son: v. 5

Even Christ "did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest." He was God's Son. To document this, the writer of Hebrews quotes from a messianic psalm (in Psalm 2:2 we find "Anointed One," that is, Messiah). The seventh verse reads:

"He said to me, 'You are my Son;  
today I have become your  
Father.'"

Again Dods comments: "It was not personal ambition that moved Christ. He did not come in His own name, nor did He seek to glorify himself" (*EGT*, IV, 287).

#### B. A Priest Forever: v. 6

The quotation here is given again in 7:17. It is taken from Psalm 110 (v. 4), the chapter in the Old Testament that is most frequently quoted in the New Testament because it is so clearly and strongly messianic.

Christ is "a priest forever," not in the order of Aaron but "in the order of Melchizedek." We will discuss this significant phrase later in the lesson.

### IV. JESUS' LIFE ON EARTH: Hebrews 5:7-10

#### A. Loud Cries and Tears: v. 7

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."

The New Testament has at least half a dozen Greek words for prayer, suggesting different emphases. The first one here is a rather general one and

so is simply translated "prayers." Joseph H. Thayer says that in combination with other terms for prayer it "gives prominence to the expression of personal need" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 126). The second term is *hiketeria* (only here in the New Testament), which may be translated "supplications" (KJV), or, to use a more contemporary word, "petitions" (NASB). It suggests coming humbly for help.

But the writer of Hebrews adds, "with loud cries and tears." This seems to be a reference to Jesus' praying in Gethsemane. Confronted with the knowledge that His Father's face would be turned away from Him on the cross, He fell to the ground and entreated: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me" (Matt. 26:39).

The Rabbis had a saying: "There are three kinds of prayers: entreaty, crying and tears. Entreaty is offered in a quiet voice, crying with a raised voice, but tears are higher than all" (quoted by Moffatt, *Hebrews*, p. 65). If we follow Jesus all the way, there will be times when we will use all three types.

Christ is said to have offered up these prayers "to the One who could save him from death." Again the reference to Gethsemane seems clear. God could have saved His Son from death on the cross. But His love for lost mankind would not let Him. In spite of all the agony of suffering, He had to go through with the planned redemption. It was the only way that salvation could come to mankind.

Even though Jesus' request was not granted—except on the basis of "if it be possible"—His prayer was "heard." Why? "Because of his reverent submission." For in Gethsemane Jesus ended His prayer by saying, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39).

#### B. Learning Obedience: v. 8

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered." This is one of the most significant verses in the New Testament on the humanity of Christ. As Son of God was He not per-



factly obedient to His Father's will? Yes, from all eternity! Then what does this mean?

The answer is that in His humanity He had to develop as a human being. This was the meaning of His incarnation. In his great kenosis passage (Phil. 2:5-8) Paul declares that the human Jesus "became obedient to death" (v. 8). This is closely parallel to what we have here in Hebrews.

Marcus Dods writes helpfully: "The result of his being heard was therefore that he suffered, but in the suffering He learned obedience, perfect unison with the will of God for the salvation of men so that He became a perfected Priest. . . . Although Son and therefore possessed of Divine love and in sympathy with the Divine purpose, He had yet to learn that perfect submission which is only acquired by obeying in painful, terrifying circumstances" (*EGT*, IV, 289).

### C. Source of Salvation: v. 9

"And once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

What does Jesus was "made perfect" mean? As divine Son of God, He was of course perfect. But He had to be perfected in His humanity. Or, as Dods suggests, the main thought here may be: "having been perfectly equipped with every qualification for the priestly office by the discipline already described. . . . Here it means the completion of Christ's moral discipline, which ended in His death" (*EGT*, IV, 289-90). Since the Greek word for "perfect" (*teleios*) basically means "complete," this interpretation is sound. Perhaps the writer of Hebrews had in mind both completion of character and completion of work. For Christ became "the source of eternal salvation" when He died on the cross.

### D. In the Order of Melchizedek: v. 10

"And was designated by God to be a high priest in the order of Melchizedek."

We purposely left the discussion of this phrase until the end, so that we could treat it in the light of its full development in chapter 7. So now we turn to that section.

Aside from Psalm 110:4—quoted twice in Hebrews (5:6; 7:17)—there is only one mention of Melchizedek in the Old Testament (Gen. 14:18), when "He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him" (Heb. 7:1). This is in striking contrast to the fact that his name occurs eight times here in Hebrews (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17).

We are told here that "Melchizedek was king of Salem [Jerusalem] and priest of the Most High" (v. 1). His name means "king of righteousness," and "king of Salem" means "king of peace" (v. 2). He was "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life" (v. 3). Most scholars agree that the true meaning becomes clear if we insert "recorded" after "without" in each case above. If Melchizedek was a human being, as is implied, he had a father and mother, and he had a beginning and end of his life on earth.

Because there is no record of his death, "like the Son of God he remains a priest forever" (v. 3).

"Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!" (v. 4). The Mosaic law required the descendants of Levi to col-

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. With such a High Priest, who do Christians fail?
2. What price did Jesus pay to become a sympathetic High Priest?
3. Why did Jesus have to be both divine and human in order to be our High Priest?
4. What was the reason for Gethsemane?
5. How did Jesus learn obedience?
6. What does "in the order of Melchizedek" mean?



lect tithes from the rest of the descendants of Abraham (v. 5). In a sense, Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek (vv. 9-10). So Melchizedek is greater than Levi.

Now we find what the Holy Spirit is wanting to say though the writer of Hebrews. We see it in verse 11: "If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood... why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the

order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?"

The Jews were saying to the Christians, "We have a high priest; you don't!" The author here writes to the Hebrew Christians, "We do have such a high priest" (8:1), one who is vastly superior to the Aaronic priests, whose place He has taken in the divine purpose. Like Melchizedek (figuratively) He has an unending priesthood.

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### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The Jews of Jesus' day took great pride in that their high priests were descended from Aaron, and so were under divine appointment. Actually, the Roman governors of Judea had made it a political appointment. In the seventy-five years between Jesus' birth (about 5 B.C.) and the destruction of Jerusalem and end of the priesthood (A.D. 70) there were twenty-five high

priests in an office that was supposed to be held for life.

Some today boast of "apostolic succession." But the New Testament teaches that there has been only one High Priest in nineteen centuries—Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is the only Head of the church, the only supreme authority.

May 24, 1981

## MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT

DEVOTIONAL READING	Ephesians 1:15-23
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Between You and God</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Between You and God</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Hebrews 8-9</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-28</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.</i> Hebrews 9:15</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>Abraham, A Man of Faith and Peace</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Genesis 13:1-12</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Hebrews 11:8; Genesis 13:7-9; Psalm 119:10</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called.</i> Hebrews 11:8</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>May 18 M.: Mindful of His Covenant. Ps. 105:1-11</p> <p>May 19 T.: End of the Law. Rom. 10:1-11</p> <p>May 20 W.: The Law Was Our Custodian. Gal. 3:23-29</p> <p>May 21 T.: A New Covenant. Heb. 8:6-13</p> <p>May 22 F.: Ministers of a New Covenant. II Cor. 3:1-6</p> <p>May 23 S.: Blood of the New Covenant. I Cor. 11:23-26</p> <p>May 24 S.: Lord of the Church. Eph. 1:15-23</p>
LESSON AIM	To increase our gratitude to Christ for the privileges of the new covenant.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> middle 60s of the first century</p> <p><b>Place:</b> uncertain</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Mediator of a New Covenant</b></p> <p><b>I. Such a High Priest:</b> Hebrews 8:1-2</p> <p><b>II. The New Covenant:</b> Hebrews 8:7-13</p> <p>A. Failure of the Old Covenant: vv. 7-9</p> <p>B. Adequacy of the New Covenant: vv. 10-13</p>

**III. The Nature of the Old Covenant: Hebrews 9:1-10****IV. Christ and His Blood: Hebrews 9:11-15**

- A. The Heavenly Tabernacle: v. 11
- B. The Most Holy Place: v. 12
- C. The Blood of Animals: v. 13
- D. The Cleansing Blood of Christ: v. 14
- E. The Mediator of a New Covenant: v. 15

**V. The Once-for-all Sacrifice: Hebrews 9:24-28**

- A. Presented in Heaven: v. 24
- B. Not an Annual Affair: v. 25
- C. Sacrifice Once for All: v. 26
- D. The Certainty of Judgment: v. 27
- E. The Second Coming: v. 28

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

Man had broken relationship with God—defied Him, disobeyed Him. It was imperative that a peace treaty be made. But who could make it?

As is always the case, “Christ” is the answer. He was the only one who was both God and man, and so the only one who could negotiate for both. Paul writes, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5).

Mediating between two human parties takes time and energy and may tax one’s intellect and emotions. But it was far more than that for Christ. He had to pay the supreme price of His own precious blood. That was the cost of making peace. For Paul adds in that same verse: “Who gave himself a ransom for all men.”

We can never properly express our gratitude to our blessed Lord for doing this. But we should thank Him every day.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

What *was* between you and God? Sin! That is what separates every unsaved individual from God.

But now what *is* between you and God? Is it still sin?

There is only one alternative answer—Christ! Either Christ or sin is between you and God right now. Which is it?

Our lesson today emphasizes that there is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (I Tim. 2:5). He is the go-between, the only one who can bring redeemed sinners into fellowship with a holy God.

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Abraham was a man of faith and obedience.
2. If we are going to live worthwhile lives, we too must believe and obey.
3. God blessed Abraham and made him a blessing.
4. He wants to do that with us also.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. SUCH A HIGH PRIEST:

#### Hebrews 8:1-2

Last week we studied about our great High Priest. The writer of Hebrews now declares, "We do have such a high priest" (v. 1).

The Jews were saying to the Hebrew Christians, "You don't have any high priest to make atonement each year for your sins." But the writer reminds his readers, "We do have such a high priest." And, as we shall soon see, our great High Priest has made adequate atonement for the sins of all the world, something that the Hebrew high priest could never do.

This High Priest has also "sat down at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven"—another exclusive superiority. No mere man has ever had this honor.

Furthermore, He "serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man" (v. 2). The tabernacle set up by Moses in the desert was just a temporary structure. This one is eternal, a place where God and man can always meet.

### II. THE NEW COVENANT:

#### Hebrews 8:7-13

#### A. Failure of the Old Covenant: vv. 7-9

The word *covenant* occurs once in Luke (1:72), twice in Acts (3:25; 7:8), twice in Romans (9:4; 11:27), three times in Galatians (3:15, 17; 4:24), once in Ephesians (2:12), and eleven times in Hebrews (8:6, 8, 9 (twice), 10; 9:4 (twice); 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20), for a total of twenty times in the New Testament.

The Greek word is *diatheke*. The common word for "covenant" in those days was *syntheke*. *Syn*, means "together," and so this word signified a compact made between two parties, with both of them agreeing together on the terms of the covenant.

But in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and in the New Testament we find not *syntheke* but *diatheke*. Why? Because God sets all the terms of the covenant. As we would say today, it is a unilateral treaty. All we have to do is to sign our name to the covenant that God offers us, and then we can enjoy the benefits it promises. And He "foots the bill"!

Verses 8-12 consist of a long quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34. This is prefaced by the statement that because the first covenant failed, God had to make a new one (v. 7).

Why did it fail? "Because they did not remain faithful to my covenant" (v. 9). The Israelites failed to obey God's conditions, and so the covenant was abrogated.

#### B. Adequacy of the New Covenant: vv. 10-13

The first covenant was made at Sinai (v. 9). The second covenant was made at Calvary.

The new covenant is a spiritual one (v. 10).

"I will put my laws in their minds  
and write them on their hearts.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people."

The first covenant (basically the Ten Commandments) was written on stone tablets; the second covenant is written on human hearts. And that makes a world of difference!

To have God's law in our minds means that we have spiritual understanding of the divine will for us. And to have those laws written on our hearts means that our wills are submitted to His will, so that we have the spirit of obedience to God's Word. This is part of what Christ provided for us on the cross.

Under the new covenant all may know God (v. 11). And the primary ben-



efit of the covenant is expressed in these terms (v. 12):

“For I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more.”

Forgiveness of sins is the first thing that every sinner needs, and Christ has provided for that by His death at Calvary.

“By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear” (v. 13). In His life on earth Christ fulfilled perfectly the terms of the old covenant. By His death on the cross He paid the penalty for man’s breaking God’s covenant. And so He replaced the old covenant by a new one, based on His spiritual presence in our hearts by His Holy Spirit.

### III. THE NATURE OF THE OLD COVENANT:

#### Hebrews 9:1-10

“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary” (v. 1). This sums up the nature of that covenant: Its accouterments were material and visible.

Verses 2-5 give us a list of the furnishings of the ancient tabernacle. The building itself consisted of two rooms. The outer one was called the “Holy Place” (v. 2). In it were “the lampstand; the table and the consecrated bread.” The King James Version calls the first of these “the candlestick,” but it consisted of seven lamps burning oil.

The inner room was called the “Most Holy Place” (v. 3), or the “Holy of Holies.” The writer says that it “had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant” (v. 4).

This creates a problem, of which most Bible students are aware. For we read in Exodus 30:6 these instructions: “Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you.” This would be in the Holy Place.

How are we to reconcile these two descriptions of the location of the altar of incense? Marcus Dods suggests that the change from “in” (v. 2) to “had” (v. 4) “is significant; and indicates that it was not precisely its local relations he had in view, but rather its ritual associations, ‘its close connection with the ministry of the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement, of which he is speaking’ (Davidson)” (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, IV, 328).

Into the outer room the priests went regularly to carry on their ministry (v. 6). “But only the high priest entered the inner room and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance” (v. 7). This was on the annual day of atonement.

The writer of Hebrews says that this fact showed the inadequacy and incompleteness of the old covenant. The way into the Most Holy Place was not open for all to enter (v. 8). The gifts and sacrifices being offered could not “clear the conscience of the worshiper” (v. 9). Everything there was only “ceremonial” (v. 10).

### IV. CHRIST AND HIS BLOOD:

#### Hebrews 9:11-15

#### A. The Heavenly Tabernacle: v. 11

In contrast to the old, inadequate regime, Christ came as high priest of “the good things that are already here.” The King James Version has “good things to come.” Both readings have good manuscript support, but the first one above (NIV) has the very earliest support. Perhaps some copyist was influenced by 10:1, where the expression is unquestionably genuine. “That are already here” emphasizes the blessings that the new covenant had brought.

Christ “went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made”—that is, the heavenly tabernacle, the very place where God dwells. The earthly tabernacle, made at

Sinai, symbolized God's presence among His people.

### B. The Most Holy Place: v. 12

When Christ went into the heavenly tabernacle, "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves [which the earthly priest always had to carry into the Most Holy Place on the day of atonement] but he entered the Most Holy Place [heaven] once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."

The Greek word for "redemption" is *lytrosis*. It comes from *lytron*, which meant the ransom price paid to free a slave. So Christ paid the price of His own blood to free us from the slavery of sin. There is no real "redemption" apart from this.

The expression "once for all" is emphatic here. The Hebrew high priest entered the Holy of Holies each year on the day of atonement to atone for the sins of the people. The fact that it was repeated annually showed that it was imperfect, incomplete. But Christ made a perfect atonement for us when He entered heaven "once for all" to present His blood as the all-sufficient atonement for the sins of mankind. Thus He obtained "eternal redemption" for us.

Marcus Dods comments that *lytrosis* "must, in consistency with the passage, be understood of the deliverance from guilt which enabled the worshiper to enter God's presence. From this flow all other spiritual blessings. It is here termed *eternal* in contrast to the deliverance achieved by the Levitical High Priest, which had to be repeated year by year. Christ obtained a redemption which was absolute and for ever valid" (*EGT*, IV, 333).

### C. The Blood of Animals: v. 13

"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean." Marcus Dods writes: "Defilement was contracted by touching a dead body, or

entering into a house in which a corpse was lying, or touching a bone or a tomb; and to enter the Tabernacle while thus defiled was to incur the penalty of being cut off from Israel. The water in which lay the ashes of the burned heifer was therefore provided for purification and by using it the worshiper was again rendered fit for entrance to the worship of God" (*EGT*, IV, 333-34).

### D. The Cleansing Blood of Christ: v. 14

If the blood of animals could bring ceremonial cleanness, "how much more" will the blood of Christ "cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" Under the old covenant the cleansing was outward; under the new it is inward.

### E. The Mediator of a New Covenant: v. 15

"Christ is the mediator of a new covenant." The Greek word for "mediator" is *mesites*—one who mediates between two parties to remove a disagreement. The word occurs six times in the New Testament, three of them in Hebrews (8:6; 9:15; 12:24). As we have already noted (see Introduction), Christ was the only one who could perform this part—because He was both God and man, and so could act as a go-between.

In the last part of this verse the truth of redemption is spelled out: "Now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant." Through this perfect Mediator we can come into the presence of God.

## V. THE ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE:

Hebrews 9:24-28

### A. Presented in Heaven: v. 24

"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of

the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence." On the phrase "for us" Dods comments, "He enters this presence and fellowship; not that He alone may enjoy it, but that we may enter into the rest and blessedness that He has won for us" (*EGT*, IV, 339).

The heart of Christianity is found in the phrase "in Christ." To put it in the simplest terms: Those who are in Christ are Christians; those who are not in Christ are not Christians. And if we are really in Christ, then, in a measure, we already share heaven's joys (the presence of God) with Him.

### B. Not an Annual Affair: v. 25

"Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own." This important point is repeated for emphasis. The writer of Hebrews was concerned to show the vast superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and He labors the contrast between the recurring sacrifices for sin under the old covenant and the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ under the new covenant.

### C. Sacrifice Once for All: v. 26

"Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the

world." As Dods says, "If Christ's one offering of Himself were not eternally efficacious, if it required periodical renewal, then this demanded periodical sacrifice. It was not without blood the entrance was made, and if the entrance required repetition, so must the sacrifice be repeated" (*EGT*, IV, 339-40). He also quotes Davidson as saying, "If his offering of Himself were not independent of time and valid as a single act, if it were valid only for the generation for whom it was immediately made, then in order to benefit men in the past, He must have suffered often, indeed in each generation of the past" (*EGT*, IV, 340).

Instead of that contingency we read, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." It took only one sacrifice, at Calvary, to atone for all the sins of all mankind of all generations.

This came "at the end of the ages." Dods points out the significance of this: "If there was to be one sacrifice for all generations, the occurrence of that sacrifice itself marked the period as the consummation. It closes the periods of symbolism, expectation and doubt" (*EGT*, IV, 340).

### D. The Certainty of Judgment: v. 27

"Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." There is nothing in this world so certain as death. Rich or poor, intelligent or unintelligent, cultured or uncultured—all people die. And just as sure and certain as is death, so is the judgment. This is one of the most important truths for all human beings to face. Everyone who has lived on earth will have to give final account to God for what his life has been.

### E. The Second Coming: v. 28

"So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Christ's present function as our High Priest?
2. What was the purpose of the old covenant?
3. Why did it fail?
4. What was the purpose of the tabernacle?
5. What was the symbolical significance of blood as an atonement for sin?
6. What will be Christ's main function at His second coming?

are waiting for him." His first coming was a time of suffering and death. His second coming will be a time of salvation and triumph for all "those who are waiting for him."

The verb *appear* highlights three tenses of Christ's ministry. In verse 26

we have the past: "He has appeared once for all . . . to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Verse 24 emphasizes the present: "Now to appear for us in God's presence." Verse 28 points to the future: "He will appear a second time." Let's be ready for Him!

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Christ is the one and only Mediator between God and men. That fact is beyond argument. He alone could mediate salvation to us.

But there is a sense in which we, as His representatives, may mediate the *message* of this glorious salvation to

others. We cannot provide salvation, but we can tell people where to get it. So there is a real sense in which we stand between Christ and those who do not know Him, inviting and urging them to come to Him.



May 31, 1981

## PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING	John 17:1-11
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Perfector of Our Faith</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Christ—from Start to Finish</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Hebrews 10—13 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Hebrews 12:1-13 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfector of our faith.</i> Hebrews 12:1, 2
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Some Ways of Following Jesus</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Hebrews 12; 13 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Hebrews 12:14a; 13:1, 2a, 16b <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Let brotherly love continue.</i> Hebrews 13:1
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	May 25 M.: Eyewitnesses of His Majesty. II Peter 1:3-7, 16-19 May 26 T.: Every Knee Should Bow. Phil. 2:1-11 May 27 W.: Reconciled Through Christ. II Cor. 5:17-21 May 28 T.: He Who Promised Is Faithful. Heb. 10:19-25 May 29 F.: The Unchanging Christ. Heb. 13:7-8, 18-21 May 30 S.: Dying in Faith. Heb. 11:13-16 May 31 S.: Keeping Them in Thy Name. John 17:1-11
LESSON AIM	To help us realize that Christ can bring our faith to perfection.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> middle 60s of the first century. <b>Place:</b> unknown
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Perfector of Our Faith</b> <b>I. The Great Faith Chapter:</b> Hebrews 11 A. Definition of Faith: vv. 1-3 B. Examples of Faith: vv. 4-31 C. Exploits of Faith: vv. 32-38 D. Perfection of Faith: vv. 39-40  <b>II. The Perseverance of Faith:</b> Hebrews 12:1-3 A. Running the Race: v. 1 B. The Perfector of Our Faith: v. 2 C. Encouragement from His Example: v. 3

**III. The Discipline of Faith: Hebrews 12:4-11**

- A. Struggle Against Sin: v. 4
- B. A Word of Encouragement: vv. 5-6
- C. Discipline of Sons: v. 7
- D. Necessity of Discipline: v. 8
- E. Submission to Discipline: v. 9
- F. Benefit of Discipline: v. 10
- G. Results of Discipline: v. 11

**IV. The Pursuit of Holiness: Hebrews 12:12-14**

- A. Strengthening Weak Knees: v. 12
- B. Making Straight Paths: v. 13
- C. Pursuing Peace and Holiness: v. 14

Our lesson today covers the last four chapters (10-13) of Hebrews. Since our lesson outline is confined to chapters 11 and 12, we shall take a glance at chapter 10 by way of introduction.

The lack of perfection in the old covenant is stressed again in verse 1. There we read: "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship." Judaism was a preparatory religion, not the final, perfect one. This came only in Christ.

The meaning of the crucifixion is beautifully expressed in verses 19 and 20: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body." On the basis of this we have the exhortation: "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (v. 23). Verses 24 and 25 give us two further exhortations. Hebrews is full of them!

1954 was a great year in sports. For the first time in recorded history the mile was officially run in less than four minutes, and it happened twice that year. On May 6 Roger Bannister, a 25-year-old medical student, ran a mile in 3 minutes and 59.4 seconds. On June 21 John Landy of Australia ran it in 3 minutes and 58 seconds.

On August 7 these two men competed in the British games at Vancouver, British Columbia. John Landy led until the last hundred yards. Then he became obsessed with the question: "Where's Roger?" He looked over his shoulder and fumbled one step. Bannister surged past him to win in 3 minutes and 58.8 seconds. Poor Landy finished in 3 minutes and 59.6 seconds. He lost by .8 of a second! He told reporters, "If I hadn't turned to look at Roger, I would have won."

Our lesson today tells us that we are running a race (12:1). The secret of winning is this: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (v. 2). Others will fail us, but He never will!

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. We are to live in peace with everybody.
2. We are to show "brotherly love" to others.
3. We are to share what we have.
4. Christ is our example for Christian living.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE GREAT FAITH CHAPTER: Hebrews 11

#### A. Definition of Faith: vv. 1-3

Logically this great faith chapter of the Bible begins with a definition of faith (v. 1): "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (KJV). That is, faith is *confidence* with regard to the unseen present. To put it in contemporary terms, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (NIV). Faith opens the door into the spiritual realm. In this day of tragic materialism, we need a divinely inwrought *certainty* of the reality of spiritual things. Only faith can give us that. Without faith we are lost—now and forever.

In our modern age of science, which has propounded various theories of the origin of the universe, verse 3 speaks a significant word to us: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." No other explanation makes sense.

#### B. Examples of Faith: vv. 4-31

The Greek word *pistei*, "by faith" (dative case of *pistis*, "faith") occurs sixteen times in these verses. Here we find about a dozen persons who achieved by faith: Abel (v. 4), Enoch (vv. 5-6), Noah (v. 7), Abraham (vv. 8-19), Isaac (v. 20), Jacob (v. 21), Joseph (v. 22), Moses' parents (v. 23), Moses (vv. 24-28), Rahab (v. 31). We also have the Israelites achieving by faith (vv. 29-30).

One important truth shines through all of these: faith and obedience go together. There is no true faith unless it

shows itself in obeying God's command.

We might note a few outstanding examples. Because Noah had faith he obeyed the divine command and built an ark. Abraham believed God and obeyed when God told him to leave home. He showed both faith and obedience when he "offered Isaac as a sacrifice," believing that God would restore his son, which he did (vv. 17-19). By faith Moses obeyed God's orders and so led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. At both the Red Sea and Jericho the Israelites believed and obeyed God and victory came. We have no right to say we believe unless we obey.

#### C. Exploits of Faith: vv. 32-38

Despairing of time or space, the writer finally exclaims: "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets" (v. 32). Through faith these "conquered kingdoms" (David and others), "shut the mouths of lions" (Daniel), "quenched the fury of the flames" (the three Hebrews, Daniel 3), "and escaped the edge of the sword" (many). Most amazingly, "Women received back their dead, raised to life again" (v. 35; see I Kings 17:23; II Kings 4:36).

This is followed by a striking list of what others suffered for their faith. We have numerous examples in the Old Testament of the things mentioned here, except for one: "they were sawed in two" (v. 37). Tradition says that this is the way the prophet Isaiah was put to death by King Manasseh.

#### D. Perfection of Faith: vv. 39-40

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received

what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." Only Christ could bring perfection, or completion. In Him all the Old Testament promises are fulfilled.

## II. THE PERSEVERANCE OF FAITH:

Hebrews 12:1-3

### A. Running the Race: v. 1

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses [the heroes of faith that we have just looked at in chapter 11, who are filling the grandstands and cheering us on, saying, "We made it, and you can make it too!"] let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

The Christian life is pictured here as a long-distance race. It is one that lasts clear to the end of our life on earth. There is no quitting if we are going to win.

Paul presents the same picture in II Timothy 4:7, where he writes, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." In the first clause "fought" is the Greek verb *agonizo*, and "fight" is the noun *agona*—"I have agonized the good agony." The verb meant to compete in an athletic contest, and the noun was used regularly for the Greek contests, the main one of which was the famous Marathon race.

Having competed well, finished his race (II Timothy was written just before Paul's death), and kept the rules, the apostle knew that he would soon receive the "crown" (v. 8)—not *diadema*, the royal diadem, but *stephanos*, the victor's crown.

The writer of Hebrews gives three secrets for winning the race. The first is "Throw off everything that hinders." No person ever won a race wearing a heavy overcoat and hip boots! We must strip ourselves of every encumbrance that would hinder us in running success-

fully. Marcus Dods comments: "The Christian runner must rid himself even of innocent things which might retard him. And all that does not help, hinders. It is by running he learns what these things are" (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, IV, 365).

In the second place, we must get rid of "the sin that so easily entangles," or clings closely. Regarding the use of the definite article ("the sin") Dods writes, "The article does not point to some particular sin, but to that which characterises all sin, the tenacity with which it clings to a man" (*EGT*, IV, 365).

The third secret of winning the race is: "Let us run with perseverance." The King James Version here, as in many other places, uses "patience." But no one ever won a race through patience! Lying down, sitting still, saying nothing—that is the picture of "patience" today; and that doesn't win a race. The Greek word here means "endurance" or "perseverance." That is what it takes to win a race, especially a long distance one.

That leads us to observe that the Christian life is not a hundred-yard dash; it is a marathon race that lasts till the end of life. Consequently it is not a matter of how *fast* we run but of how *far* we go.

If a person is competing in a hundred-yard dash the important thing is the initial surge at the crack of the pistol. But a runner in a marathon (26 miles) will start slowly so as to keep going. It is perseverance that wins. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" (Gal. 5:7). It is *keeping on* that wins the race.

### B. The Perfecter of Our Faith: v. 2

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down on the right hand of the throne of God."

Jesus finished His race on earth, and now He stands at the goal line,



ready to receive us and give us the victor's crown. If we keep our eyes on Him, we will not fail to win. But if we look around at others, we will fail (see illustration in Suggested Introduction for Youth). He is the only perfect example for Youth to follow.

The Greek word for "author" is *archegon*, which primarily means "leader," and then "originator" or "founder." The word for "perfecter" is *teleiotes*, found only here in the New Testament.

Marcus Dods writes on this verse: "Success depends on the condition attached, fixing our gaze on Him who sets us the example (*archegon*) of faith, and exhibits it in its perfect form (*teleiotes*), who leads us in faith and in whom faith finds its perfect embodiment. *Archegos* properly means one to whom anything owes its origin (cf. ii. 10), but here it rather indicates one who takes the lead or sets the example most worth following. Jesus is the *archegos* of the faith because He is its *teleiotes*. In Him alone do we see absolute dependence on God, implicit trust, what it is, what it costs, and what it results in. (Hence the human name *Jesus*.) On Him therefore must the gaze be fixed if the runner is to endure, for in Him the reasonableness, the beauty, and the reward of a life of faith are seen. Faith manifested itself in Jesus, especially in His endurance of the cross in virtue of His faith in the resulting joy beyond" (*EGT*, IV, 366.).

### C. Encouragement from His Example: v. 3

"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." The Gospels are filled with accounts of this "opposition." The Greek word is *antilogia*, which Arndt and Gingrich would translate here as "hostility" (*Lexicon*, p. 74). It has the basic idea of "speaking against."

If we feel that people are hard on us, what about Jesus! He was attacked by His critics, the religious leaders, day after day.

## III. THE DISCIPLINE OF FAITH: Hebrews 12:4-11

### A. Struggle Against Sin: v. 4

"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." James Moffatt says that the writer is saying to his readers: "Your sufferings have been serious and sharp (10:32f), but nothing to what others before you, and especially Jesus, had to bear. Will you give way under lesser strain than theirs?"

### B. A Word of Encouragement: vv. 5-6

"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons." There follows a four-line quotation from Proverbs 3:11, 12:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
because the Lord disciplines those whom he loves,  
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

The Greek noun for "discipline" (KJV, "chastening") is *paideia*. It comes from *pais*, "child," and so literally means "child-training." The verb is *paideuo*, "train as a child." Quite obviously, "discipline" is the term we use today for this.

This quotation from Proverbs brings out a very beautiful, comforting truth: Discipline is an evidence of God's love! It is those He loves whom He disciplines. So instead of being discouraged by His discipline, we should be encouraged, as it proves that He still loves us.

### C. Discipline of Sons: v. 7

"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?"

This gives a second reason why we

should endure divine discipline with joy, not sorrow: that we are being disciplined shows that we are God's children. To put it in simple terms, if God spans us for something we do, we know that we are in the family! That is great cause for rejoicing, not grumbling.

#### D. Necessity of Discipline: v. 8

"If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons." If God never disciplines us, we might well become concerned as to whether we are His true children.

#### E. Submission to Discipline: v. 9

"Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!"

The expression "Father of our spirits" has caused considerable comment. Dods quotes Davidson as saying: "It is as a spirit, or on his spiritual side, that man enters into close relationship with God; and this leads to the conception that God is more especially the Author of man's spirit, or Author of man on his spiritual side, and to designations such as those in Num. xvi. 22" (*EGT*, IV, 368). If human discipline was respected, how much more should it be so with divine discipline.

#### F. Benefit of Discipline: v. 10

"Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." Divine discipline's main benefit is that it makes us more like our heavenly Father.

Dods comments: "The reasonableness of the appeal of ver. 9 is further illustrated by a comparison of the character and end in the earthly and heavenly fathers' discipline respectively. The earthly fathers exercised discipline for a few days in accordance with what commended itself to their

judgment as proper; à judgment which could not be infallible and must sometimes have hindered rather than helped growth; but the heavenly Father uses discipline with a view to our profit that we may partake of his holiness" (*EGT*, IV, 368).

#### G. Results of Discipline: v. 11

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

The author here names two results of discipline: "righteousness and peace." These often show up quickly! A child throws a fit, has temper tantrums, screams, and kicks. All is bedlam. Then the parent administers proper discipline. Within minutes the atmosphere is changed. The child behaves righteously, and a beautiful, quiet peace succeeds the storm. Discipline pays!

### IV. THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS: Hebrews 12:12-14

#### A. Strengthening Weak Knees: V. 12

The author seems now to return to the figure of the race, with which this chapter begins. We are to strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees by

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How essential is faith?
2. What are some of the fruits of faith?
3. How can we strengthen our faith?
4. In what ways is the Christian life like a race?
5. What things are essential to winning a race?
6. How can we achieve better discipline at home and in school?

proper exercise, so that we can live successfully and not "cave in." We are also to strengthen others.

### B. Making Straight Paths: v. 13

Dods summarizes the thrust in this way: "The whole verse forms an admonition to the healthier portion of the church to make no deviation from the straight course set before them by the example of Christ, and thus they would offer no temptation to the weaker members . . . to be turned quite out of the way, but would rather be an encour-

agement to them and so afford them an opportunity of being healed of their infirmity" (*EGT*, IV, 369).

### C. Pursuing Peace and Holiness: v. 14

The Greek literally says: "Keep on pursuing peace with all people, and the sanctification, apart from which no one will see the Lord." All our lives we are to be pursuing peace with our fellow men and holiness of heart and life. This is a part of the life-long race described in verse 1.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

In our day discipline has almost been thrown out the door. "Self-expression" is the keyword of the hour. Some psychologists have said that children should be allowed to express themselves in any way; they should never be punished. The result is the wild, undisciplined living of a generation of spoiled babies.

Our lesson today emphasizes the importance and benefit of both human and divine discipline. Only those who have been properly disciplined by parents and teachers are apt to achieve self-discipline, without which life is chaos.

# **THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY**

**Unit I: Foundations for Faith**

**Unit II: Laws to Live by**

**Unit III: Covenant Renewal**





June 7, 1981

## HEARING GOD'S COMMANDS

DEVOTIONAL READING	Acts 2:1-13
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Hearing God's Commands</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Hearing God's Commands</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> II Kings 22-23; Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> II Kings 23:1-2; Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and keep his charge, his statutes, his ordinances, and his commandments always.</i> Deuteronomy 11:1</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>God Calls a Leader</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-12; Deuteronomy 10:12-15, 17-22</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Exodus 3:4-12</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and soul.</i> Deuteronomy 11:13</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p><b>June 1 M.:</b> Finding the Book of Law. II Kings 22:3-10</p> <p><b>June 2 T.:</b> Huldah Prophesies. II Kings 22:11-20</p> <p><b>June 3 W.:</b> Renewing the Covenant. II Kings 23:1-3, 21-22</p> <p><b>June 4 T.:</b> The Wrath of the Lord. II Kings 23:24-30</p> <p><b>June 5 F.:</b> Stone Tables for the Ark. Deut. 10:1-5</p> <p><b>June 6 S.:</b> God of Love and Justice. Deut. 10:12-22</p> <p><b>June 7 S.:</b> Coming of the Spirit. Acts 2:1-13</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us realize the importance of obeying God's commands.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> about 622 B.C.</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Jerusalem</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Hearing God's Commands</b></p> <p><b>I. Good King Josiah:</b> II Kings 22:1-2</p> <p><b>II. Repair of the Temple:</b> II Kings 22:3-7</p> <p><b>III. Discovery of the Book of the Law:</b> II Kings 22:8-10</p> <p><b>IV. Reaction of the King:</b> II Kings 22:11-13</p>

**V. Message from the Lord:** II Kings 22:14-20

**VI. Renewal of the Covenant:** II Kings 23:1-3

A. Meeting of the Elders: v. 1

B. Reading of the Law: v. 2

C. Pledge of the People: v. 3

**VII. Divine Requirement:** Deuteronomy 10:12-13

**VIII. Challenge of Moses:** Deuteronomy 10:14-22

A. God's Choice of Israel: vv. 14-15

B. Circumcise Your Hearts: v. 16

C. The Lord of Lords: v. 17

D. God's Concern for Aliens: vv. 18-19

E. Fear the Lord: v. 20

F. God's Blessing on Israel: vv. 21-22

**IX. Love and Obedience:** Deuteronomy 11:1

This quarter's thirteen lessons are devoted to the study of Deuteronomy. Though it is one of the most important books in the Old Testament, it is relatively little known to most Christians.

Deuteronomy consists mainly of three discourses of Moses: (1) review of history (cc. 1-4); (2) review of the law (cc. 5-28); (3) renewal of the covenant (cc. 29-33). The book closes with a final chapter (34), which was added after Moses' death (see v. 6).

Our study of Deuteronomy is broken down into three units: I. Foundations for Faith (4 sessions); II. Laws to Live By (5 sessions); III. Covenant Renewal (4 sessions). Today's lesson examines the historical significance of Deuteronomy, as indicated by the account in II Kings of the discovery of the Book of the Law in the temple and the subsequent reform instituted by good King Josiah.

Today we begin our study of the first unit of this quarter: "Foundations of Faith." And the first foundation is "Hearing God's Commands."

Hearing involves obeying. When your mother says, "Listen to me," she means, "Do what I'm telling you to do." So hearing God's commands means giving attention to them and obeying them.

If we are going to hear God's commands we must read His Word, because the Bible tells us what God wants us to do. We need to read it daily so that we will learn His will and follow it.

Have you really discovered the Bible, as Josiah discovered the Book of the Law? Are you reading it every day and seeking to order your life by it? This is what it means to be a Christian.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Moses gave the people God's law, as recorded in the Book of Exodus.
2. But he gave it again to a new generation, as recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy.
3. So each generation needs to hear it afresh.
4. We find God's laws in the Bible.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. GOOD KING JOSIAH:

#### II Kings 22:1-2

Josiah began his reign when he was only eight years old (v. 1). His mother's name was Jedidah, which means "darling." She must have been a godly woman, for we read of her son, Josiah: "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the ways of his father [forefather] David, not turning aside to the right or to the left" (v. 2). It may very well be that in heaven this otherwise unknown woman will receive much of the reward for her son's great reforms.

Josiah "reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years." This would probably be 639-608 B.C.—a very crucial period in Judah's history.

Except for the mention of Josiah's mother, these two verses are duplicated in II Chronicles 34:1-2. But there the chronicler adds two significant items not in Kings. The first is this: "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young [only fifteen or sixteen years old] he began to seek the God of his father David" (v. 3). The second is: "In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places." Both of these happened when he was still in his teens.

### II. REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE:

#### II Kings 22:3-7

"In the eighteenth year of his reign [when he was twenty-five or twenty-six years old] King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan... to the temple of the LORD" with specific instructions.

He was to go to Hilkiah the high priest and get ready the money that the doorkeepers had collected from the people (v. 4). This was to be entrusted to the supervisors of the work on the temple, who would "pay the workers who repair the temple of the LORD—the carpenters, the builders and the masons" (vv. 5-6). The money was also to be used for purchasing timber and dressed stone to repair the temple. Shaphan was told that these supervisors "need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are acting faithfully" (v. 7). In II Chronicles 34:12 the supervisor's names are given. There were four of them, all Levites. We are told there in verse 13: "Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and doorkeepers"—assistants to the priests.

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry began "in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah" (Jer. 1:2). One cannot help wondering how much he may have influenced the young king in his worthy endeavors.

### III. DISCOVERY OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW:

#### II Kings 22:8-10

Hilkiah the high priest reported to Shaphan the secretary: "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it (v. 8).

What was this Book of the Law? We know that the Law was a name given to the five books of Moses—Genesis through Deuteronomy. Some scholars have proposed that it was only the Book



of Deuteronomy that was found in the temple, and they speak of the "Deuteronomic reform" under Josiah.

George Rawlinson says: "But there seem to be no sufficient grounds for questioning the ancient opinion—that of Josephus, and the Jews generally—that it was a copy of the entire Pentateuch. . . . The words, 'the book of the Law,' are really sufficient to decide the point; since, as Keil says, they 'cannot mean anything else, either grammatically or historically, than the Mosaic book of the Law (the Pentateuch), which is so designated, as is generally admitted, in the Chronicles and the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah'" (*The Pulpit Commentary*, "The Second Book of the Kings," p. 437).

Shaphan the secretary went and reported to the king that the money matters were all taken care of properly, according to the king's instructions (v. 9). Then he added, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book" (v. 10).

Rawlinson comments on the wording here: "Shaphan does not venture to characterize the book, as Hilkiah has done. He is not officially learned in the Law. And he has read only a few passages of it. To him, therefore, it is only 'a book,' the authorship and value of which he leaves it to others to determine" (*Commentary*, p. 437).

We are then told: "And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king" (v. 10). He could not have read the five books of Moses, or even Deuteronomy in its entirety, in any reasonable length of time. It seems rather obvious that in both verse 8 and verse 10 we have the reading of only excerpts from the Law.

Wicked King Manasseh had introduced idolatry into Judah during his fifty-five-year reign (II Kings 21:1-9). Apparently the Book of the Law had been lost sight of, and was now discovered in the temple.

#### IV. REACTION OF THE KING: II Kings 22:11-13

Josiah's spiritual sensitivity is shown by the fact that when he heard

the words of the Book of the Law, "he tore his robes" (v. 11)—a sign of great sorrow and concern. He sent five of his trustworthy men (v. 10) with these orders: "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for all the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us" (v. 13).

Rawlinson comments: "Josiah recognized that Judah had done, and was still doing, exactly those things against which the threatenings of the Law were directed—had forsaken Jehovah, and gone after other gods, and made, to themselves high places, and set up images, and done after the customs of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before them" (*Commentary*, p. 438). How could the Lord do otherwise than punish Judah for her gross sins?

#### V. MESSAGE FROM THE LORD: II Kings 22:14-20

Obediently the five men went to Huldah the prophetess. "She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District" (v. 14). Huldah gave them a message from the Lord that began with a stern warning: "I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read" (v. 16). This was "because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made" (v. 17).

But then the Lord had a message of comfort for good King Josiah: "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people. . . . and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the

disaster I am going to bring on this place" (vv. 19-20).

Josiah was the last good king of Judah. Thirty-five years later, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian armies.

## VI. RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT:

II Kings 23:1-3

### A. Meeting of the Elders: v. 1

"Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem." It was a time for action, and the king typically did not hesitate to do what was needed.

### B. Reading of the Law: v. 2

It appears that the elders were summoned so that they would gather all the people together. For now we read that the king "went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD." All classes were present to hear what God had to say to them.

### C. Pledge of the People: v. 3

"The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD." And "all the people pledged themselves to the covenant."

It was a great day, such as had not been seen in a long time. But one wonders how deep and firm the commitment of the people was. Unfortunately, Josiah's great revival and reformation was short-lived. The next generation went into Babylonian captivity.

## VII. DIVINE REQUIREMENT:

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

"And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the

LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?"

Adam Clarke notes that God requires: "(1) That you *fear* Him as Jehovah your God; Him who made, preserves, and governs you. (2) That you *walk in all his ways*—that, having received His precepts, you obey the whole; walking in God's ways, not your own, nor in the ways of the people of the land. (3) That you *love him*—have confidence in Him as your Father and Friend, have recourse to Him in all your necessities, and love Him in return for His love. (4) That you *serve Him*—give Him that worship which He requires, performing it with all your *heart*—the whole of your affections, and with all your *soul*—your will, understanding, and judgment. In a word, putting forth your whole strength and energy of body and soul in the sacred work" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 212). These two verses cover the whole of life.

## VIII. CHALLENGE OF MOSES: Deuteronomy 10:14-22

### A. God's Choice of Israel: vv. 14-15

"To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today."

This is one of the great mysteries of all time, one that we shall never fathom fully in this life. Why would God choose Israel above all other nations?

If we insist on understanding everything before we believe, we'll never make it. "We'll understand it better by and by" covers a lot of territory. When we cannot understand what God is doing, we can still believe that *He* knows and that He is doing what is best.

God's choice of Israel has given us the Old Testament—and we might also say, the New Testament. It has given us our Savior, and so our salvation. The ultimate outcome of the choice of Abraham and Israel has worked out for the good of all humanity. We can only praise God for what He has done.

### B. Circumcise Your Hearts: v. 16

"Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." God gave the Israelites the rite of circumcision as a sign of His covenant with them. Unfortunately, they emphasized the physical aspect and failed to see its spiritual significance. But even in Moses' day He was telling them to circumcise their hearts.

The second part of the verse suggests what this circumcision of the heart means. What is cut away? The implication here is that it is self-will, that which gets us into trouble and puts us at enmity with God in our souls. We need to ask Him to remove all self-will from our hearts, so that we want only *His* will—all the time and in all things. Circumcision of the heart is the greatest need of all Christians.

### C. The Lord of Lords: v. 17

"For the LORD your God is God of gods, and LORD of lords, the great God,

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At what age do the largest number of people experience conversion?
2. What were the steps in Josiah's renewal?
3. What part does the Bible play in revival?
4. What causes lapse from renewal?
5. How would you explain "fear the Lord"?
6. What are the ingredients of true love?

mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes." We can't bribe or barter our way into heaven!

Adam Clarke comments: "He is the Source whence all being and power proceed; every agent is finite but himself; and He can counteract, suspend, or destroy all the actions of all creatures whensoever He pleases. . . . How absolutely necessary to have such a God for our Friend" (*Commentary*, p. 212).

### D. God's Care for Aliens: vv. 18-19

"He defendeth the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourself were aliens in Egypt."

One way to help ourselves treat other people as we should is to imagine ourselves in their place. How would *we* feel if we were where *they* are? Moses reminded the Israelites that they were once aliens in Egypt. Now they should treat aliens living in their country the way their parents would like to have been treated in Egypt.

God sets us the example in His love for the oppressed. We, in turn, should love those whom others hate.

### E. Fear the Lord: v. 20

"Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name."

The biblical meaning of "fear the Lord" is something that challenges our thinking. Today the verb "fear" means "be afraid." Are we to be afraid of God?

In the *American Heritage Dictionary* one of the meanings given for the verb "fear" is "to be in awe of; revere." That, of course, is the meaning here.

*The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* has an article headed "Fear, Awe." That gives the proper combination. Sinners need to be afraid of a holy God. But all men should feel a reverent sense of awe toward the Supreme Being.



W. Mundle, the author of the article just cited, points out the difference between the Greek and Israelite attitudes toward deity. He writes: "The Israelite can stand before God in fear and love" (I, 622). How much more is this true for the Christian!

#### F. God's Blessing on Israel: vv. 21-22

"He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes" (v. 21).

On the first clause Adam Clarke makes this comment: "It is an eternal honor to any soul to be in the friendship of God. Why are people ashamed of being thought religious? Because they know nothing of religion. He who knows his Maker may glory in his God, for without Him what has any soul but disgrace, pain, shame, and perdition?" (*Commentary*, p. 212).

Then Moses as much as says, "See what God has done for you!" He declared, "Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky"

(v. 22). The survival of Israel in Egypt was a miracle, to say nothing of its increase. The seventy had grown to many hundreds of thousands. And it was all because of God's love and care for His people.

#### IX. LOVE AND OBEDIENCE: Deuteronomy 11:1

"Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always."

Love and obedience can never really be separated. If we do not obey Him, we do not love Him.

This is highlighted in the New Testament. In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (NIV). Obedience is both the test and the proof of love. We always are to obey God's commands. Failure to do this shows that we do not love Him with all our hearts. For if we do, we want to please Him and we find our highest pleasure in doing so.

Jesus declared that the first, the highest commandment, is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This means constant obedience.

### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

True renewal and revival always come with a return to the Word of God. When we neglect our daily reading of the Bible we can become careless and disobedient. It has been well said, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will

keep you from the Bible." If we have become careless about reading God's Word, let us ask God's forgiveness and move at once into the light that can come only from "His Word—a lamp to our feet and a light to our path."



June 14, 1981

## CLAIMING GOD'S PROMISE

DEVOTIONAL READING	II Corinthians 13:5-13
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Claiming God's Promise</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Claiming God's Promise</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Deuteronomy 1 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Deuteronomy 1:19-26, 29-31 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Behold, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has told you.</i> Deuteronomy 1:21
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Journey from Egypt</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Exodus 14 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Exodus 14:19-22, 31 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord.</i> Exodus 14:13
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>June 8 M.:</b> Moses Speaks in the Wilderness. Deut. 1:3-9 <b>June 9 T.:</b> Moses Speaks About Judges. Deut. 1:9-18 <b>June 10 W.:</b> Moses Speaks About the Spies. Deut. 1:19-25 <b>June 11 T.:</b> Moses Speaks of God's Care. Deut. 1:26-33 <b>June 12 F.:</b> Moses Speaks of God's Denial. Deut. 1:34-40 <b>June 13 S.:</b> Moses Speaks of Disobedience. Deut. 1:41-46 <b>June 14 S.:</b> Do What Is Right: II Cor. 13:5-13
LESSON AIM	To encourage us to step out on God's promises.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> probably about 1400 B.C. <b>Place:</b> Moab, east of the Jordan River
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Claiming God's Promise</b> <b>I. The Setting:</b> Deuteronomy 1:1-4 A. The Place: vv. 1-2 B. The Time: vv. 3-4  <b>II. The Divine Command:</b> Deuteronomy 1:5-8 A. Leave Mount Sinai: vv. 5-6 B. Advance: v. 7 C. Take Possession: v. 8

**III. The Appointment of Leaders:** Deuteronomy 1:9-18

A. The Problem: vv. 9-12

B. The Solution: vv. 13-18

**IV. The Investigation of the Land:** Deuteronomy 1:19-25

A. Arrival at Kadesh Barnea: v. 19

B. Challenge of Moses: vv. 20-21

C. Caution of the People: v. 22

D. Compliance of Moses: v. 23

E. Exploration by the Spies: v. 24

F. Report of the Spies: v. 25

**V. The Rebellion of the People:** Deuteronomy 1:26-28

A. Refusal to Obey: v. 26

B. Grumbling Against God: vv. 27-28

**VI. The Reassurance by Moses:** Deuteronomy 1:29-31**VII. The Disobedience of the People:** Deuteronomy 1:32-46

The name of the book we study this quarter, Deuteronomy, is compounded of two Greek words: *deuteros* ("second") and *nomos* ("law"). That is because the bulk of the book (cc. 5-28) is taken up with Moses giving the law a second time.

The first time Moses gave the law was at Mount Sinai, where he received from God the Ten Commandments (written on two stone tablets) and the rest of the law contained in the Book of Exodus. Moses, as the divinely appointed leader, gave this law in turn, to the people. It spelled out God's covenant with His chosen nation.

The first giving of the law was to the generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt. But because the people disobeyed at Kadesh-Barnea—as we shall see in today's lesson—the Lord decreed that none of that generation (except Caleb and Joshua) would see the Promised Land. So the Israelites wandered in the desert of Sinai for nearly forty years, until that generation died off. It was necessary that the law should be given to those who had not heard it at Sinai, hence Deuteronomy.

Claiming God's promise is the way to effective living. The Bible is full of promises, yet we claim so few of them!

One year I had accepted assignments from six different publishers. All of them were due by December 31.

On December 15 I still had one manuscript left to write—the commentary on Matthew for the *Beacon Bible Commentary*. It involved a vast amount of research and the writing of hundreds of pages. What could I do?

For emergency situations God has emergency pro-

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visions. Six days a week for my three weeks of Christmas vacation I wrote from 4:00 a.m. to midnight, just stopping for meals. When school opened in January I kept this schedule, taking time off for only eating and teaching. On February 15 I completed the manuscript. For eight weeks I daily claimed the promise: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:25, KJV). And God did not fail!

Now, with a heavy writing schedule, my daily promise is Isaiah 41:10, 13. I claim it every time I sit down to write.

#### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. God saved the Israelites from Egyptian slavery.
2. He wants to save us from slavery to sin.
3. God cared for the Israelites on all their journeys.
4. He will take care of us as we journey through life.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE SETTING:

Deuteronomy 1:1-4

#### A. The Place: vv. 1-2

"These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan—that is, in the Arabah" (v. 1). The Israelites, led by Moses, were approaching the Promised Land (Canaan), but they were still on the east side of the Jordan River. The land of Canaan lay between the Jordan Valley and the Mediterranean Sea.

"Arabah" is a Hebrew word that is translated "plain" over forty times in the Old Testament (KJV). Today it is a proper name, the Arabah, referring to the continuation of the Jordan Valley past the Dead Sea and on to the south.

The area is further defined as "opposite Suph"—not "the Red Sea" (KJV), which was very far off from here, but a place nearby called "Red" (Hebrew *Suph*). Five other places are also mentioned as bounding the area where the Israelites were.

Verse 2 adds a parenthetical statement: "It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea by the Mount Seir road." Adam Clarke observes: "The Israelites were eleven days in going from Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea,

where they were near the verge of the Promised Land; after which they were thirty-eight years wandering up and down in the vicinity of this place, not being permitted, because of their rebellions, to enter into the promised rest, though they were the whole of that time within a few miles of the land of Canaan!" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 205). What a terrible waste of time! For the thirty-eight years that they wandered in the desert, they could have been living in the fruitful land of promise.

#### B. The Time: vv. 3-4

"In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month" (v. 3) marks the span of time since they left Egypt, after celebrating the passover, which took place on the fourteenth day of the first month.

We are further told that this was after Moses "had defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon [see Num. 21:21-31] and at Edrei had defeated Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth" (see Num. 21:33-35). These were victories that Moses and the Israelites won just before they moved on to the plains of Moab (see Num. 22:1).

## II. THE DIVINE COMMAND:

Deuteronomy 1:5-8

### A. Leave Mount Sinai: vv. 5-6

"East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying . . ." (v. 5). Thus is introduced the message from the Lord (vv. 6-8) that Moses communicated to the Israelites.

In the introduction to our previous lesson we noted that the first four chapters of Deuteronomy consist of the first of three discourses given by Moses, which was a review of history. In these chapters Moses traces God's dealings with the Israelites since they left Egypt.

Logically, he begins with "Horeb," a variant name for Mount Sinai. There God said to the people, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain" (v. 6). They had been there for about a year (see Exod. 19:1-2 and Num. 10:11-12), and during that time they had received the law and had built the tabernacle (Exod. 20-40).

### B. Advance: v. 7

"Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites." Whereas Moab and Ammon had rather well defined territories, the Amorites were scattered here and there. The "Negev" (Hebrew for "south") refers to the southern part of what is now Israel (around Beersheba). The "seacoast" was the territory of the Philistines. The "land of the Canaanites" was what God had especially promised to Israel. But the Lord also said to advance "to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates." Israel has never possessed Lebanon (on the north) or reached the Euphrates River, not even in the days of the sweeping conquests made by David. But God promised it to Abraham (Gen. 15:18).

### C. Take Possession: v. 8

"See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the

LORD swore he would give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to their descendants after them." In Genesis we read of the promise to Abraham (12:7; 15:18; 17:8), to Isaac (26:3), and to Jacob (28:13). On his deathbed Joseph said to his brothers: "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). Now the last part of that promise was about to be fulfilled.

## III. THE APPOINTMENT OF LEADERS:

Deuteronomy 1:9-18

### A. The Problem: vv. 9-12

There were 600,000 adult male Israelites (Num. 11:21), besides women and children. Moses found the care of this vast multitude too heavy a burden for him to bear (v. 9). He could not handle all their problems, burdens, and disputes (v. 12).

### B. The Solution: vv. 13-18

So Moses suggested choosing "wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes" (v. 13). The people responded, "What you propose to do is good" (v. 14).

Moses proceeded thereupon to appoint men "as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens" (v. 15). We find much the same terminology in Exodus 18:25. The language of verses 16-17 is also somewhat paralleled in Exodus 18:26.

Interestingly we read of another time when Moses felt the burden too heavy, as the Israelites wailed for food (Num. 11:10-15). That time the Lord told him to bring seventy elders to the tent of meeting, where the Lord would ordain them as Moses' helpers (Num. 11:16-17). It is certainly not unreasonable to believe that Moses would have twice cried out for help.



#### IV. THE INVESTIGATION OF THE LAND:

Deuteronomy 1:19-25

##### A. Arrival at Kadesh-Barnea: v.19

"Then, as the LORD our God commanded us, we set out from Horeb and went toward the hill country of the Amorites through all that vast and dreadful desert that you have seen, and so we reached Kadesh-Barnea." We have already seen that this took eleven days (v. 2). A glance at a map will show that Kadesh-Barnea was in the north-east part of the Sinai Desert.

##### B. Challenge of Moses: vv. 20-21

After reminding the Israelites that they had now reached the hill country of the Amorites and God was giving it to them (v. 20), Moses exhorted the people: "See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (v. 21). It was now the time to begin the conquest of Canaan—with no crossing of the Jordan, just going straight north into the Land of Promise.

##### C. Caution of the People: v. 22

Unfortunately, the Israelites lacked the courage, faith, and consecration of their leader. Their reply to Moses' challenge was: "Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to."

In Numbers 13:2 we read that the Lord directed Moses to send the spies. It may well be that the fearful people first asked for this, and then God told Moses to go ahead and do it.

##### D. Compliance of Moses: v. 23

"The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe." If they were going to have spies, this was a wise procedure. Each tribe would be represented in the report and recommendation.

##### E. Exploration by the Spies: v. 24

"They left and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshcol and explored it." Numbers 13:25 informs us that the twelve spies spent forty days searching the land. They apparently did a thorough job.

##### F. Report of the Spies: v. 25

The spies brought back some "fruit of the land." In Numbers 13:23 we are told that they brought back one cluster of grapes so heavy it took two men to carry it on a pole between them. So the place was called "Eshcol," which means "a cluster of grapes."

The report of the spies was: "It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us." More fully, they said: "It does flow with milk and honey." (Num. 13:27). Unfortunately, they added a negative note: "But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large" (Num. 13:28). This negative side finally prevailed.

#### V. THE REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE:

Deuteronomy 1:26-28

##### A. Refusal to Obey: v. 26

The lack of faith, and so of obedience, shows up here pathetically. "But you were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God." Instead of listening to God's commands and believing His promises, the people listened to the discouraging words of ten of the spies (see Num. 13:30-14:9) and absorbed their doubt. It is always true that disbelief leads to disobedience, and the end is apt to be open rebellion against God, as it was here.

##### B. Grumbling Against God: vv. 27-28

The people grumbled in their tents and said: "The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to de-

stroy us" (v. 27). Disbelief led to sheer blasphemy!

Typically they blamed it on others: "Our brothers made us lose heart" (v. 28). Ten of the spies had said, "The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Amalekites there." These were giant men known for their prowess.

When we listen to the wrong people, we get into trouble. We should doubt the doubters and believe the believers.

## VI. THE REASSURANCE BY

MOSES:

Deuteronomy 1:29-31

Moses had told the people back at Kadesh-Barnea: "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes" (vv. 29-30). This reminder should have been abundantly adequate. The people at Kadesh-Barnea had seen their miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, when God fought for them and destroyed the Egyptian army. Surely He could do it again!

Also in the desert "you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place" (v. 31). The memory of how God has helped us in the past should be sufficient to bolster our faith that He can meet our every need in the present and future.

Disbelief is one of the greatest sins we can commit. God has never failed us in the past, and He will not fail us now. It is high insult to doubt Him. And the results of disbelief and disobedience are tragic beyond imagination!

## VII. THE DISOBEDIENCE OF

THE PEOPLE:

Deuteronomy 1:32-46

Moses continued: "In spite of this"—all the wonderful things God had done for them in the past—"you did not trust in the LORD your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by

night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go" (vv. 32-33). God's manifest presence with us by day and by night should be all the support we need for our faith. Of course, we do not have a visible symbol of His presence, as the Israelites did in the desert. But we do have the inner assurance of His Spirit, and for spiritually-minded believers that is fully adequate. Even when we do not consciously feel His presence—in times of severe test—we can still hold on by faith. But those Israelites, with the visible manifestation of God's presence, had no excuse whatever.

No wonder the Lord was angry with the people. Because they doubted His promise and disobeyed His command, not one of that generation that left Egypt, except Caleb and Joshua, would enter the Promised Land (vv. 36, 38). They were the two believing spies who brought back a good report and urged the people to go in and possess the land (Num. 14:6-9). The hateful, rebellious attitude of the people is described far more vividly in Numbers (14:1-4, 10) than it is here in Deuteronomy. There was no hope for rebels like that!

Unfortunately, Moses also suffered. The Lord said to him: "You shall not enter it, either. But your assistant Joshua, son of Nun, will enter it. En-

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How much time do we waste in our lives through failing to obey God fully?
2. How are faith and obedience linked inevitably together?
3. What might Kadesh-Barnea signify to us?
4. What does "Canaan" represent for us?
5. How should God's past dealings with us prepare us for the future?
6. What is the real difference between faith and presumption?

courage him, because he will lead Israel to inherit it" (vv. 37-38). Because Moses disobeyed God in striking the rock, rather than speaking to it (Num. 20:7-12), he was not allowed to enter the land.

Through Moses the Lord said to the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea: "And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it. But as for you, turn around and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea" (vv. 39-40). Because they had refused to go forward, they would have to go back. There is no standing still in one's spiritual life.

Then the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea did a dangerous thing. Again they disobeyed God's command. They were going to go up and fight anyhow (v. 41).

God told Moses to warn them that He would not go up with them; so they should desist from their attempt (v. 42). In spite of this the people would not listen. "You rebelled against the LORD's command and in your arrogance you marched up into the hill country" (v. 43). As a result the Amorites "chased you like a swarm of bees and beat you down from Seir all the way to Hormah" (v. 44).

Faith and presumption are two very different things; in fact, they are opposites. Faith is claiming God's promise and obeying His command. Presumption is trusting our own strength and acting in self-will. Sadly, there have been many times when people professed to act in faith, but it was really presumption, as the tragic consequences clearly revealed. The keynote of this lesson is the necessity of always obeying God.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

At Kadesh-Barnea the Lord told the people, through Moses, to go forward into Canaan. They refused to obey, and the result was that they wandered in the desert of Sinai until all that generation died off.

Probably most Christians some time in their experience come to Kadesh-Barnea. God says, "Go forward into the

land of rest that I have promised to give you."

Those who obey move forward into a higher plane of spiritual life, where their will is totally dedicated to God's will and so they have a deeper, more constant rest inside. Those who disobey go back into a spiritual desert. The choice is ours.

June 21, 1981

## RECALLING GOD'S ACTION

DEVOTIONAL READING	Romans 4:13-25
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Recalling God's Action</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Recalling God's Action</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Deuteronomy 3:12—4:14</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-10</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.</i> Deuteronomy 4:9</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>In the Wilderness</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Exodus 16—17:7</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Exodus 17:3-7</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.</i> I Peter 5:7</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p><b>June 15 M.:</b> Pass Through Esau's Territory. Deut. 2:1-8</p> <p><b>June 16 T.:</b> A Hardened Spirit Brings Defeat. Deut. 2:24-31</p> <p><b>June 17 W.:</b> God Fights for You. Deut. 3:18-22</p> <p><b>June 18 T.:</b> Look but Don't Cross. Deut. 3:23-28</p> <p><b>June 19 F.:</b> Keep God's Statutes and Ordinances. Deut. 4:1-8</p> <p><b>June 20 S.:</b> Teach Your Children God's Commands. Deut. 4:9-14</p> <p><b>June 21 S.:</b> Faith in the Promise. Rom. 4:13-25</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us recall God's deeds in the past.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> about 1400 B.C.</p> <p><b>Place:</b> Moab, east of the Jordan River</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Recalling God's Action</b></p> <p><b>I. Allotments to Two and a Half Tribes:</b> Deuteronomy 3:12-20</p> <p>A. Reuben and Gad: v. 12</p> <p>B. Half Tribe of Manasseh: vv. 13-15</p> <p>C. Territory of Reuben and Gad: vv. 16-17</p> <p>D. Instructions to the Two and a Half Tribes: vv. 18-20</p>



**II. Moses' Command to Joshua:** Deuteronomy 3:21-22**III. Moses Forbidden to Enter Canaan:** Deuteronomy 3:23-29**IV. Obedience to God's Law:** Deuteronomy 4:1-2

A. Source of Life: v. 1

B. No Additions or Subtractions: v. 2

**V. High Privilege of Israel:** Deuteronomy 4:5-8

A. Knowledge of God's Law: v. 5

B. Wisdom and Understanding: v. 6

C. A God Who Is Near: v. 7

D. Righteous Decrees and Laws: v. 8

**VI. Reception of the Law at Sinai:** Deuteronomy 4:9-14

A. Necessity of Remembering: v. 9

B. Meeting with God at Sinai: v. 10

C. The Mountain on Fire: v. 11

D. The Voice of God: v. 12

E. The Ten Commandments: v. 13

F. The Divine Decrees and Laws: v. 14

Last week we studied the first chapter of Deuteronomy. The first twenty-five verses of chapter 2 describe the wanderings of the Israelites for about thirty-eight years in the desert of Sinai.

After some time had passed, the Lord commanded the people to turn north (v. 3) and "pass through the territory of your brothers the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir" (v. 4). It will be remembered that Esau was the brother of Jacob (Israel). So the Israelites were "brothers" to the Edomites (another name for them). Consequently, the Israelites were not to take their land (v. 5). The same thing was true of the Moabites (v. 9) and the Ammonites (v. 19), since Moab and Ammon were Lot's sons (Gen. 19:36-38).

The last part of chapter 2 (vv. 26-37) describes in some detail the defeat of Sihon, king of Heshbon. The first part of chapter 3 (vv. 1-11) narrates the defeat of Og, king of Bashan. The territories of these two kings were later occupied by the two and a half tribes that settled east of the Jordan.

One of the marks of a newly converted Christian is a love for God's Word. In my earlier years I read the Bible because my godly parents required it. But when Jesus really came into my heart when I was fifteen, everything suddenly changed. I discovered a new love for the Bible. Evening after evening I would read it, reveling in it like a cow in a clover patch!

The result was a constant deepening of my spiritual life. I memorized many precious promises; and that gave me the needed courage to face life victoriously. I memorized whole psalms, as well as chapters in the New Testament (e.g.,

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John 14-17). This filled my life with joy and praise. I read God's commandments carefully, and this kept me from sin. Youth can do nothing better than get deep into the Word!

1. God provided food and water for the Israelites in the desert.
2. He can provide for all our needs today.
3. He is the only one who can provide for our spiritual needs.
4. We should be concerned for the needs of others.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. ALLOTMENTS TO TWO AND A HALF TRIBES:

Deuteronomy 3:12-20

#### A. Reuben and Gad: v. 12

After describing the conquests east of the Jordan (see Introduction), Moses went on to say: "Of the land that we took over at that time, I gave the Reubenites and the Gadites the territory north of Aroer by the Arnon Gorge, including half the hill country of Gilead, together with its towns." The Arnon Gorge emptied into the east side of the Dead Sea at about midpoint of that body of water. From there to the north end of the Dead Sea was the special area of the tribe of Gad. The tribe of Reuben was located north of this, on the east side of the Jordan River between the Dead Sea on the south and the Sea of Galilee on the north. This latter area was called "Gilead," a plateau above the Jordan Valley.

#### B. Half Tribe of Manasseh: vv. 13-15

While Gad possessed the western section, "the rest of Gilead [the eastern part] and also all of Bashan [northeast of Gilead] the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half tribe of Manasseh" (v. 13).

#### C. Territory of Reuben and Gad: vv. 16-17

Again Moses says that he gave the Reubenites and Gadites the territory

from Gilead down to the Arnon Gorge, but then adds: "and out to the Jabbok River, which is the border of the Ammonites" (v. 16). Actually, the Jabbok flows into the Jordan almost midway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, but it begins far to the south and so formed the western border of the Ammonites. For this whole area of Reuben and Gad the western border was the Jordan River, "from Kinnereth to the Sea of the Arabah"—"the Salt Sea," better known as the Dead Sea (which is exceedingly salty). "Kinnereth" is the Hebrew name for the sea of Galilee, and it is the official Jewish name today.

#### D. Instructions to the Two and a Half Tribes: vv. 18-20

Moses now recounts the orders he had given Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh: "All your able-bodied men, armed for battle, must cross over ahead of your brother Israelites. However, your wives, your children and your livestock . . . may stay in the towns I have given you, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they too have taken over the land that the LORD your God is giving them, across the Jordan."

At this point, one should turn to Numbers 32 and read the full account there. "The Reubenites and Gadites, who had very large herds and flocks, saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were suitable for livestock" (v. 1). So they came to Moses and the leaders of

the community and asked to be allowed to settle there. "Do not make us cross the Jordan" (vv. 2-5), they pleaded.

Moses reprovved them severely for this (vv. 6-13) and even called them "a brood of sinners" (v. 14). But they immediately promised that after they had their families and livestock safely settled, they would "go ahead of the Israelites until we have brought them to their place" (vv. 16-17).

Moses accepted their proposal (vv. 20-22). Now, before his death, he is reminding them of their firm obligation.

## II. MOSES' COMMAND TO JOSHUA:

### Deuteronomy 3:21-22

"At that time I commanded Joshua. . . ." Moses probably wanted to remind Joshua, and also the Israelites standing there, of his words to him previously: "You have seen with your own eyes all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings"—Sihon and Og. "The LORD will do the same to all the kingdoms over there where you are going. Do not be afraid of them; the LORD your God himself will fight for you."

It was magnanimous of this aging leader to speak so encouragingly to his successor in command. It shows that Moses was not thinking just of himself, but that his first concern was for the welfare of God's people. There were no "sour grapes" here as he prepared to turn everything over to his young assistant.

The real test of our dedication is this: Do we care more about our own interests or about kingdom interests? Are we really seeking "first" God's kingdom and righteousness, rather than our own benefit and honor?

## III. MOSES FORBIDDEN TO ENTER CANAAN:

### Deuteronomy 3:23-29

There is a strong touch of pathos in this passage. Moses humbly confessed that he had pleaded with the Lord: "O

Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. . . . Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan—that fine hill country and Lebanon." He had lived with this keen expectation for forty years.

But God said, no. He told the old prophet and leader to go to the top of Mount Pisgah and look at the land from a distance (v. 27). Moses would not be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter Canaan. Instead he was to commission, encourage, and strengthen Joshua for the task of leading the people into the Promised Land (v. 28).

Moses had spent forty years in valuable training (briefly at home, but mostly in Pharaoh's palace). The next forty years were spent in the solitude, caring for sheep and learning important lessons. This was followed by forty years of leading the complaining, rebellious Israelites in the desert of Sinai, establishing the nation on firm foundations. Now it was somebody else's turn to take over—a difficult fact for an old leader to accept.

## IV. OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW:

### Deuteronomy 4:1-2

#### A. Source of Life: v. 1

"Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you."

Disobedience brings death—spiritual death here and hereafter. Obedience brings life, now and always. We have to make our choice between the two. Nobody else can choose for us.

#### B. No Additions or Subtractions: v. 2

"Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you." We have no right to add to the revealed Word of God, as the Book

of Mormon does. Nor are we free to take anything away.

## V. HIGH PRIVILEGE OF ISRAEL: Deuteronomy 4:5-8

### A. Knowledge of God's Law: v. 5

"See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it." Only the Israelites had the law that had been given at Mount Sinai by God Himself. It was vastly superior to the religious beliefs or moral laws of any other nation.

### B. Wisdom and Understanding: v. 6

"Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"

Adam Clarke comments: "There was no mode of worship at this time on the face of the earth that was not wicked, obscene, puerile, foolish, or ridiculous, except that established by God himself among the Israelites. And every part of this, taken in its connection and reference, may be truly called a wise and reasonable service." He adds: "Almost all the nations in the earth showed that they had formed this opinion of the Jews, by borrowing from them the principal part of their civil code" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 207).

### C. A God Who Is Near: v. 7

"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD, our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" How little do we appreciate the fact that we can come to God in prayer, anytime, anywhere, and He is right there to hear us! This is the greatest privilege that any human beings could have. We should rejoice in

this wonderful blessing and make the most of it.

## D. Righteous Decrees and Laws: v. 8

"And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" Any careful study of history will underscore the force of this question. That God revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai the decrees and laws we find in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy is corroborated by any comparison with the laws of the nations of that day. In the Old Testament we are conscious that a holy God of wisdom is speaking to us.

## VI. RECEPTION OF THE LAW AT SINAI: Deuteronomy 4:9-14

### A. Necessity of Remembering: v. 9

"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

The way to remember these things is to read about them regularly in our Bibles. Daily Bible reading is one of the most important safeguards of our spiritual life.

Adam Clarke writes: "It is not sufficient to lay up divine things in the memory; they must be laid up in the *heart*. 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart,' says David, 'that I might not sin against thee.' The life of God in the soul of man can alone preserve the soul to life everlasting; and this grace must be retained all the days of our life." On the last part of the verse he comments: "If a man knows the worth of his own soul, he will feel the importance of the salvation of the souls of his family. Those who neglect family religion neglect personal religion; if more attention were paid to the former, even among those called



religious people, we should soon have a better state of civil society. On family religion God lays much stress; and no head of a family can neglect it without endangering the final salvation of his own soul" (*Commentary*, p. 207).

### B. Meeting with God at Sinai: v. 10

Moses recalled to his audience one of the most significant events in all history, the day when God spoke to the Israelites at Mount Sinai (here called "Horeb"). There the Lord told His leader to assemble the people before the sacred mountain to hear His words. Again we have the emphasis: "teach them to their children." This note appears over and over. It is the only way that true religion can continue.

### C. The Mountain on Fire: v. 11

"You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness."

The account in Exodus 19:16-19 is even more vivid. There we read: "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. . . . Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a

furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him."

The holy God was confronting sinful man. The Lord wanted to impress this fact upon His people. He also wanted them to understand the supreme importance of the covenant He was making with them at Sinai. It was inauguration day for a new era. And so God, as it were, put on a spectacular display of His power and holiness. What was happening in the giving of the law at Sinai was nothing to be taken lightly. The people of Israel needed to be shocked into an awareness of this great moment in their lives. God was meeting man in a new way.

### D. The Voice of God: v. 12

"Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice." Moses was preparing the people for his topic in the next paragraph—the terrible sin of idolatry. God is Spirit. He can speak to us and we can recognize His voice. But He has no visible form.

### E. The Ten Commandments: v. 13

"He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets." It seems clear that the Ten Commandments, given at Sinai, are identified here as God's covenant with His people. We shall find later that the same thing is indicated in chapter 5. The heart of God's covenant was the Ten Commandments. These were the basic rules the people were to keep. If they did so, God would bless them. If they did not they broke the covenant and lost His blessing.

### F. The Divine Decrees and Laws: v. 14

"And the LORD directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we know God's will for our lives?
2. Where, when, and why should we read God's Word?
3. How can we understand it better?
4. How can we teach it to our children?
5. Who is the greatest Teacher of the Word?
6. What is the value of recalling God's dealings with us in the past?

you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

Moses' most important function was not that of civil administrator and supreme judge over Israel, but that of teaching the people God's law. There is no higher vocation. To expose people to God's Word and help them to understand its meaning is more important than being president or prime minister.

All of us should seek, by prayerful study and the help of the Holy Spirit, to have a correct understanding of the Scriptures. Then we should share that knowledge as we have opportunity.

Sinners are sitting in darkness. We need to turn on the light of God's Word, as opportunity affords. This is what all people need more than anything else.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Do you want to grow in grace? Then read biographies of the great saints of the past. There is nothing that will be much more helpful to your spiritual life.

As a teenage Christian I read one biography after another. It did more than anything else to challenge me to live for God and others. It deepened my devotion and strengthened my determination to live a dedicated life. I realized that I was the spiritual child of

many of God's chosen servants.

Later, in graduate school, I assembled in my private library a dozen biographies of John Wesley, as well as whole shelves of biographies and autobiographies of men and women of God. They have made an immeasurable contribution to my own life.

Don't waste time reading trash! Read good biographies and learn how to live.

June 28, 1981

## EXPERIENCING GOD'S PRESENCE

DEVOTIONAL READING	Hosea 6:1-6
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Experiencing God's Presence</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Experiencing God's Presence</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Deuteronomy 4:15-49</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Deuteronomy 4:32-40</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy.</i> Psalm 16:11</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>God Gives Laws for Living</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Exodus 19-20:17</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Exodus 20:1-4, 6-10a, 12-17</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>All that the Lord has spoken we will do.</i> Exodus 19:8</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p><b>June 22 M.:</b> The Lord's Name Proclaimed. Exod. 34:1-10</p> <p><b>June 23 T.:</b> The Glory of God's Presence. Exod. 34:29-35</p> <p><b>June 24 W.:</b> God Is a Jealous God. Deut. 4:15-24</p> <p><b>June 25 T.:</b> God Is a Merciful God. Deut. 4:25-31</p> <p><b>June 26 F.:</b> God of Heaven and Earth. Deut. 4:32-40</p> <p><b>June 27 S.:</b> Summary of Moses' Speech. Deut. 4:41-49</p> <p><b>June 28 S.:</b> Return and Be Revived. Hosea 6:1-6</p>
LESSON AIM	To increase our comprehension and appreciation of the fact that we may experience the presence of God.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> about 1400 B.C.</p> <p><b>Place:</b> land of Moab</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>Experiencing God's Presence</b></p> <p><b>I. Warning Against Idolatry:</b> Deuteronomy 4:15-20</p> <p>A. God Is Invisible: v. 15a</p> <p>B. No Images Allowed: vv. 15b-18</p> <p>C. Heavenly Bodies Not to be Worshiped: v. 19</p> <p>D. God's Own People: v. 20</p> <p><b>II. Repeated Exhortation:</b> Deuteronomy 4:21-24</p> <p>A. Moses Soon to Leave: vv. 21-22</p> <p>B. Do Not Forget the Covenant: v. 23</p> <p>C. A Jealous God: v. 24</p>

**III. Consequences of Idolatry:** Deuteronomy 4:25-31

- A. Scattering Among the Nations: vv. 25-28
- B. Opportunity for Repentance: vv. 29-31

**IV. A Unique People:** Deuteronomy 4:32-34

- A. Unique in History: v. 32
- B. Unique in Privilege: v. 33
- C. Unique in Divine Favor: v. 34

**V. The Only True God:** Deuteronomy 4:35-40

- A. The LORD Is God: v. 35
- B. A Speaking God: v. 36
- C. The Divine Presence: vv. 37-38
- D. The God of Heaven and Earth: v. 39
- E. Keep His Commands: v. 40

**VI. The Cities of Refuge:** Deuteronomy 4:41-43

Our lesson today begins with a strong warning against idolatry. We are apt to think this has no message for us today. We intelligent moderns would never think of bowing down to manmade images, as the foolish pagans did long ago and as some ignorant people still do!

But there is as much idolatry in America as in Asia or Africa. Our idols are of a different kind, but Americans worship them every day.

What is an idol? It is anything that takes first place in our lives, anything that gets between us and the worship of the one true God. What are these American idols in modern, sophisticated society? Well, what is it that takes the time, attention, and supreme devotion of most people?

Probably *money* ranks first place in American idol worship. Second place would probably go to *pleasure*. God save America from idolatry!

Are you experiencing God's presence? In Psalm 16:11 (our key verse today) we read:

"You have made known to me the  
path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your  
presence."

Would you like to have real joy every day? Of course you would! Where can you find it? The psalmist gives us the answer: in God's presence.

If we take time to seek and sense God's presence, we will find joy every day—in spite of disappointments or things seemingly going wrong.

The happiest people I have met are those who have most successfully learned to practice the presence of God. If we are His born-again children we can rightfully claim His presence. But we have to take time to become conscious of it.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH



CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. God has given us laws for living.
2. If we obey those laws we will live happy, useful lives.
3. The Ten Commandments are God's basic laws for living.
4. We cannot break them without suffering for it.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. WARNING AGAINST IDOLATRY:

Deuteronomy 4:15-20

#### A. God Is Invisible: v. 15a

"You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire." We have already seen this emphasis in our previous lesson (4:12). It is clear that Moses made this his main argument against trying to make any carved or graven image of God. He has no physical form, so no image can be made that will represent Him.

The pagans imagined what their gods looked like and made their idols accordingly, but the Israelites were not to do that.

#### B. No Images Allowed: vv. 15b-18

"Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the water below."

In those days Baal was the most popular male god, and Astarte was the popular goddess (plural, *Ashtaroth*). In Egypt they worshiped the bull, and later the sacred crocodile. In India I once saw worshipers flocking to a monkey temple. Images of birds have been used in pagan religions, and snake worship (v. 18) is still practiced today. Moses told the people that all of these were forbidden.

People become like the gods they worship. Those who worship the true God of heaven tend to become more holy like Him. Those who worship animals

tend to live like animals, rather than like human beings made in the image of God. That is the tragedy of idolatry.

#### C. Heavenly Bodies Not to be Worshiped: v. 19

To worship the sun, moon, and stars is surely no less degrading and unreasonable than worshiping creeping things on the ground. Sun worship has been practiced widely, but is a matter of worshiping creation rather than the Creator.

#### D. God's Own People: v. 20

Moses reminds the Israelites that the Lord took them out of the unendurable heat of slavery in Egypt to be "the people of his inheritance." They should worship Him alone as the true God.

### II. REPEATED EXHORTATION: Deuteronomy 4:21-24

#### A. Moses Soon to Leave: vv. 21-22

The reason that Moses felt such a heavy concern to reinforce these teachings by repetition was that he knew his days as leader were almost at an end. He was deeply burdened for the future of the nation.

Again he reminds the people that it was "because of you" (v. 21) that he lost his temper and struck the rock, resulting in his being forbidden to enter the Promised Land. It was obviously a sore point with him, for he had already discussed it at some length (3:23-29).

So Moses now says: "I will die in this land; I will not cross the Jordan; but you are about to cross over and take possession of that good land" (v. 22). How he

would have loved to go with them! This was doubtless the greatest disappointment in Moses' entire life. Instead of criticizing him for mentioning it again, we should honor him for submitting to God's will and not rebelling or resisting. Moses had learned difficult lessons of obedience, and almost without exception he obeyed God fully.

**B. Do Not Forget the Covenant:**  
v. 23

With deep concern Moses pleaded again: "Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden." To break the first two commandments (5:7-10) would be to break the covenant.

Moses had good reason to be concerned. He had discovered the people already worshipping a golden calf they had made, when he came down from Mount Sinai with the two stone tablets in his hands, containing the Ten Commandments. And the Israelites did and would go into idolatry many times in the centuries that followed.

**C. A Jealous God: v. 24**

"For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." We are so apt to think of jealousy as a green-eyed monster that it is a bit shocking to learn that the Holy One, who is pure love, is a jealous God.

But all true love is jealous. The husband who is not jealous of his wife's affection does not really love her. Jealousy can be very wicked, to be sure. But it can also be a holy jealousy for God and righteousness. A lack of it may be a sign of moral indifference.

**III. CONSEQUENCES OF IDOLATRY:**

**Deuteronomy 4:25-31**

**A. Scattering Among the Nations: vv. 25-28**

Moses warned the people against becoming corrupt and going to idolatry.

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess" (v. 26). Their enjoyment of the land of promise was conditioned on their obedience of God's commands, the covenant He made with them. The people would be scattered among the nations, where only a few would survive (v. 27). They would worship manmade gods (v. 28).

**B. Opportunity for Repentance:**  
vv. 29-31

Moses held out a hope, however: "But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul" (v. 29). Genuine repentance would bring restoration (v. 31).

History has verified Moses' words. The Israelites did go into idolatry, and so into captivity—to Assyria and Babylonia. But those who repented of their sin were restored to the land of promise in due time. God is true to His Word.

**IV. A UNIQUE PEOPLE:**  
**Deuteronomy 4:32-34**

**A. Unique in History: v. 32**

Moses threw out a challenge to his listeners. Let them inquire about the past, "ask from one end of the heavens to the other," ferret out all the history of mankind. The prophet asked, "Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of?"

The obvious answer is, no. Israel was utterly unique among the nations of the earth in having a great experience of God's saving presence.

**B. Unique in Privilege: v. 33**

"Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?"

Adam Clarke gives a helpful treatment of this verse. He writes: "It seems to have been a general belief that if God

appeared to men it was for the purpose of destroying them; and indeed most of the extraordinary manifestations of God were in the way of judgment. But here it was different; God did appear in a sovereign and extraordinary manner, but it was for the deliverance and support of the people. They heard His voice speaking with them in a distinct, articulate manner. They saw the fire, the symbol of His presence, the appearances of which demonstrated it to be supernatural. Notwithstanding God appeared so terrible, yet no person was destroyed, for He came, not to destroy, but to save" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 208).

### C. Unique in Divine Favor: v. 34

"Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation?" Clarke observes: "This was a most extraordinary thing, that a whole people, consisting of upwards of 600,000 effective men, besides women and children, should, without striking a blow, be brought out of the midst of a very powerful nation, to the political welfare of which their services were so essential; that they should be brought out in so open and public a manner; that the sea itself should be supernaturally divided to afford this mighty host a passage; and that, in a desert utterly unfriendly to human life, they should be sustained for forty years. These were such instances of the almighty power and goodness of God as never could be forgotten" (*Commentary*, p. 208).

How did God take them out? "By testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, . . . by great and awesome deeds." Clarke comments: "In this verse Moses enumerates seven different means used by the Almighty in effecting Israel's deliverance. (1) Temptations, *massoth*, from *nasah*, 'to try or prove'; the miracles which God wrought to try the faith and prove the obedience of the children of Israel. (2) Signs, *ethoth*, from *athah*, 'to come near'; such signs as God gave them of

His continual presence and especial providence, particularly the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire, keeping near to them night and day, and always directing their journeys. (3) Wonders, *mophethim*, from *yaphath*, 'to persuade.' (4) War, *milchamah*, 'hostile engagements'; such as those with the Amalekites, the Amorites, and the Bashanites, in which the hand of God was seen rather than the hand of man. (5) A mighty hand, *yad chazakah*; one that is strong to deal its blows, irresistible in its operations, and grasps its enemies hard, so that they cannot escape, and protects its friends so powerfully that they cannot be injured. (6) A stretched out arm, *zeroa netuyah*; a series of almighty operations, following each other in quick, astonishing succession. . . . (7) Great terrors. . . such terror, dismay, and consternation as were produced by the ten plagues" (*Commentary*, p. 208).

## V. THE ONLY TRUE GOD:

Deuteronomy 4:35-40

### A. The LORD Is God: v. 35

"You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other."

In most versions of the Old Testament, when we find "Lord" it translates the Hebrew *Adonai*; when we find "LORD" it translates the Hebrew *Yahweh* or *Yahveh*. This is a personal name: "Yahweh is God, besides him there is no other."

One might well ask: If Yahweh is a personal name, why not use it as a proper noun in a translation of the Bible? The English Revised Version (1885) decided against doing this, though the American Standard Version (1901) adopted "Jehovah." This is a hybrid form that no scholar would use today.

As we have noted before, the Hebrew alphabet has no vowels, just consonants. Vowel sounds were added in reading the Scriptures aloud. But the problem is that no devout Jew would



pronounce this sacred name; so we cannot be certain as to the exact pronunciation. For this reason the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version have elected to stay by the traditional translation "LORD."

### B. A Speaking God: v. 36

"From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire."

Moses keeps going back to the scene that took place in connection with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19). He is seeking to impress indelibly on the minds of the people that the God who spoke to them from the fiery mountain was different—totally different—from any of the so-called gods of the pagan world.

It is a sad experience in the Orient to stand before the tallest statue of Buddha in the world (about twenty meters high) and sense the lifelessness of the cold stone, or to see hundreds of pilgrims gathered before a massive sitting Buddha. The sightless eyes and closed mouth are a symbol of the helplessness of Buddha and the hopelessness of the people.

Israel had the true, the only God. He is the speaking God, who not only reveals himself in powerful, supernatural works, but also speaks His commands to His people.

### C. The Divine Presence: vv. 37-38

"Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today."

God loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ("your forefathers") and chose their "descendants," the Israelites. How much depended on the faithfulness of those patriarchs!

Because of His great love, God res-

cued the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage "by his Presence." This is what the Hebrew says, and it is a beautiful expression. It highlights the fact that all we need for any emergency of life is the divine presence. If we have that, all is well. His presence brings deliverance from sin, constant companionship, sure guidance, needed power to go where He directs and do what He commands.

His presence that had brought the Israelites out of Egypt (v. 37) would also bring them into the Promised Land (v. 38). The power of His presence would drive out the great, strong nations there and give the land to the Israelites as their inheritance.

### D. The God of Heaven and Earth: v. 39

"Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other."

Why does Moses keep repeating the fact there is only one true God? (cf. v. 35). The Israelites were surrounded by pagan polytheism on every side. This godly prophet and leader knew that there would be a constant temptation to the people to turn aside to other gods. People want something they can see! The monotheism of Moses affected all subsequent history.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What idols are people around us worshipping?
2. What ones threaten us most?
3. How can we safely avoid slipping into worldly idolatry?
4. What are some lessons that we can learn from the history of Israel?
5. How can we hear God's voice today?
6. How do we know that there is only one true God, and who He is?



**E. Keep His Commands: v. 40**

"Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time."

The Lord gave to Israel the Promised Land "for all time." But there were conditions attached, as we saw in the early part of our lesson today. If the people obeyed, they would stay in the land and enjoy it. If they disobeyed, they would be scattered throughout the earth.

This scattering occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. But it happened on a much wider scale after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Since then the Jews have literally been scattered to the ends of the earth.

But now the Jews have been returning in large numbers to the Promised Land. We should certainly pray that they will accept Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. That is what all must do today.

**VI. THE CITIES OF REFUGE:  
Deuteronomy 4:41-43**

"Then Moses set aside three cities of refuge east of the Jordan, where anyone who had killed a person could flee and find refuge if he had unintentionally killed his neighbor without malice aforethought. He could flee into one of these cities and save his life" (vv. 41-42).

Later Moses gave instructions for three cities of refuge to be designated on the west side of the Jordan in the land of Canaan itself (Deut. 19:1-3). They were to be "centrally located" (v. 2) and of easy access (v. 3). But the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan also needed them. So Moses took care of this before his death.

The three cities that Moses selected are named here. There was one each for the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh (v. 43). This would make it possible for anyone to reach the city of refuge in his area within a few days.

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**CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

Several centuries ago a man called Brother Lawrence made famous the slogan: "Practicing the Presence of God." This has too often been a neglected theme among Christians. We believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior. We know that we are children of God. We go to church regularly to enjoy

God's presence in the sanctuary. But we fail to practice His presence in our daily lives.

Attention to this all-important aspect of Christian living could transform our lives over a period of time. It is something that all of us could give more thought to.

July 5, 1981

## TEN COMMANDMENTS

DEVOTIONAL READING	Romans 5:6-11
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Ten Laws</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>God Acts/Demands!</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Deuteronomy 5 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Deuteronomy 5:6-8, 11-21 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live in the land which you shall possess.</i> Deuteronomy 5:33
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> A Place of Worship <b>Background Scripture:</b> Exodus 39:32—40:38; Numbers 9:15-23 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Exodus 40:34-38 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>You shall worship the LORD your God and him only shall you serve.</i> Matthew 4:10
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>June 29 M.:</b> Laws About God. Deut. 5:1-15 <b>June 30 T.:</b> Laws About Others. Deut. 5:16-21 <b>July 1 W.:</b> The Voice of God. Deut. 5:22-27 <b>July 2 T.:</b> Obey God's Laws. Deut. 5:28-33 <b>July 3 F.:</b> God's Perfect Law. Ps. 19:7-14 <b>July 4 S.:</b> "How I Love Thy Law!" Ps. 119:97-104 <b>July 5 S.:</b> Love Fulfills the Law. Rom. 13:8-10
LESSON AIM	To impress upon us the importance of the Ten Commandments as the basic laws of life.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> about 1400 B.C. <b>Place:</b> Moab
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Ten Commandments</b> <b>I. Introductory Words:</b> Deuteronomy 5:1-6 A. By Moses: vv. 1-5 B. By the Lord: v. 6 <b>II. The Ten Commandments:</b> Deuteronomy 5:7-21 A. No other Gods: v. 7 B. No Idols: vv. 8-10 C. Do Not Misuse God's Name: v. 11

- D. Remember the Sabbath: vv. 12-15
- E. Honor Your Parents: v. 16
- F. Don't Murder: v. 17
- G. Don't Commit Adultery: v. 18
- H. Don't Steal: v. 19
- I. Don't Give False Witness: v. 20
- J. Don't Covet Others' Possessions: v. 21

### III. The Two Stone Tablets: Deuteronomy 5:22

Today we begin a unit of five lessons on "Laws to Live By." Basically these are the Ten Commandments, which we study today. But there are other important laws that are added as safe guidance for life.

The last paragraph of the fourth chapter gives a sort of "Introduction to the Law" (NIV heading). We read in verse 44: "This is the law Moses set before the Israelites." The next verse expands the nomenclature somewhat: "These are the stipulations, decrees and laws Moses gave them when they came out of Egypt." More specifically, this second giving of the Law took place "in the valley near Beth Peor east of the Jordan, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon and was defeated by Moses and the Israelites as they came out of Egypt" (v. 46). Og, king of Bashan, whose land they conquered, was also an Amorite king (v. 27).

The limits of this territory occupied by the Israelites are given again (vv. 48-49). They extended from the Arnon Gorge in the south (by the Dead Sea) to lofty Mount Hermon in the north, a distance of some two hundred miles.

Our topic is "God Acts/Demands!" It has been well said that a summary title for the Old Testament might be: "The Acts of God."

The thing we must realize is that a divine event—such as at Sinai and Calvary—involves both act and word. God was certainly in action when He led the Israelites out of Egypt, delivered them at the Red Sea, and confronted them at Sinai. But Mount Sinai is remembered for what God spoke there, especially the Ten Commandments.

Modern society flouts the Ten Commandments. People take God's name in vain, desecrate the Sabbath, dishonor parents, murder, commit adultery, steal, give false witness, and covet the wives of others. But all of us are suffering from the results of this arrogant breaking of God's law. Let's keep God's laws and live!

1. God led the Israelites by a visible fire and cloud.
2. He leads us invisibly by His Spirit.
3. The Israelites had an elaborate place of worship.
4. Because ours is a more spiritual religion, we need especially an inward sense of God's presence.

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

#### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. INTRODUCTORY WORDS:

Deuteronomy 5:1-6

#### A. By Moses: vv. 1-5

"Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them" (v. 1).

There is a lot wrapped up in this verse. The three key words are *hear*, and *learn*, and *follow*, and these are in logical order. We must first *hear* if we are going to *learn*. The reason there is not more learning taking place in church services and Sunday school classes is that there is not enough listening. The first thing we must do is *hear*.

And then we must *learn*. This means that we give careful attention to what is said and "mull it over" in our minds. All learning is a thinking process. So we must not only have our ears open but our minds working.

But if our learning is going to do us any good we must *follow* what we have learned. Actually, doing is a part of learning, for we learn better as we carry out the instructions.

Again, as often before, Moses reminds the people: "The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb" (v. 2)—that is, at Mount Sinai. This was an event that the Israelites should never forget. This was the basis of their relationship to God. It spelled out both the privileges and the responsibilities of that relationship. God was the Giver, but the recipients had certain conditions they must meet if they were to enjoy the blessings of the covenant.

Verse 3 means: "It was not with our fathers [alone] that the LORD made this covenant, but with us [also]." For the covenant was first made at Sinai with the previous generation, which then perished in the desert. But now it is being renewed with the new generation.

"The Lord spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain" (v. 4).

At Mount Sinai Moses stood between the Lord and the Israelites, because they were afraid of the fire. Moses' courage in going up the mountain is amazing!

#### B. By the Lord: v. 6

God's words were: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." It is very impressive how often this language occurs. God wanted His people to remember that it was He who had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, and so they owed Him their very existence as a free nation.

As Christians we need to keep in mind constantly that Christ has redeemed us from the slavery of sin. Never should we become complacent or ungrateful. Apart from the grace of God we would all be condemned sinners, without God and without hope in the world. As His people we should realize our responsibility to live grateful, obedient, dedicated lives, following His commandments carefully day by day.

### II. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: Deuteronomy 5:7-21

#### A. No Other God: v. 7

"You shall have no other gods before me"—or, "besides me" (margin). At first glance this might seem irrelevant to us today. We are not tempted to worship pagan gods. How does this, the first commandment, apply to us?

The answer, of course, will be found in our previous lesson. There we noted that our "god" is what gets first attention in our lives and holds first place in our hearts. For many Americans this is money or pleasure. With some of us the temptation might be to put our vocation first, or some avocation that we love more than anything else.

Every human being is faced with the danger of a "first love" other than



God Himself. We sometimes say that a parent "idolizes" his or her child. We do need to be on our guard to make sure that nothing takes first place in our lives but God and His will.

### B. No Idols: vv. 8-10

On verse 8 Adam Clarke comments: "This commandment prohibits every species of external idolatry, as the first does all idolatry that may be called internal or mental. All false worship may be considered of this kind, together with all image worship, and all other superstitious rites and ceremonies" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 126).

Why were the people forbidden to bow down and worship these idols? The answer is given in verse 9: "For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God." Clarke comments: "This shows in a most expressive manner the love of God to this people. He felt for them as the most affectionate husband could do for his spouse; and was *jealous* for their fidelity, because He willed their invariable happiness" (*Commentary*, p. 126).

The next clause is a bit more difficult to understand: "punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." Clarke writes: "This necessarily implies—if the children walk in the steps of their fathers; for no man can be condemned by divine justice for a crime of which he was never guilty; see Ezekiel xviii. Idolatry is however particularly intended, and visiting sins of this kind refers principally to national judgments. By withdrawing the divine protection the idolatrous Israelites were delivered up into the hands of their enemies, from whom the gods in whom they had trusted could not deliver them. This God did to the *third and fourth generation*, i.e. 'successively,' as may be seen in every part of the Jewish history, and particularly in the Book of Judges. And this, at last, became the grand and the only effectual and lasting means in His hand of their final deliverance from idolatry; for it is well known

that after the Babylonish captivity the Israelites were so completely saved from idolatry as nevermore to have disgraced themselves by it as they had formerly done" (*Commentary*, p. 126). National, not personal, judgment is referred to here.

But this is only one side of the picture. The other side is beautifully portrayed in verse 10: "but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments." God displays justice to the third and fourth generation; He shows His love—or, "mercy" (KJV), or "lovingkindness" (NASB)—to thousands of generations; that is the way many commentators take it. "God is love," and He loves to manifest Himself in love.

### C. Do Not Misuse God's Name: v. 11

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." This command is certainly very pertinent to our day, when even in casual conversation, on television, and over the radio God's name is taken in vain many thousands of times every day. Doubtless most people do it thoughtlessly, carelessly, not realizing the seriousness of the habit. But the Ten Commandments are still in force. And we are told very plainly here that God will not hold guiltless anyone who breaks this command. Reverence for God's name is an important matter.

### D. Remember the Sabbath: vv. 12-15

"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you" (v. 12). The Hebrew word *shabbath* means "rest" or "cessation from labor."

In the first creation God rested on the seventh day and sanctified it (Gen. 2:2-3). But in the new creation Jesus rose from the grave on the first day of the week. That is why we Christians rest and worship on Sunday.

I have had modern seventh-day worshipers tell me that Christian worship on Sunday was instituted by Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor (fourth century), or by an early pope. But those who use such arguments show their ignorance of history. The *Didache* from the second century gives vivid description of Christian services of worship—always early on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 suggests that this custom of worshiping on the first day of the week (communion service) had already begun by A.D. 57, within a generation of the resurrection.

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” In it you shall not do any work...” (vv. 13-14). Clarke observes: “No work should be done on the Sabbath that can be done on the preceding days, or can be deferred to the succeeding ones. Works of absolute necessity and mercy are alone excepted” (*Commentary*, pp. 126-27).

An interesting instruction is included here in verses 14 and 15. The Israelites were not to make their servants work on the Sabbath. They were to remember that they (their fathers) were slaves in Egypt, where they were probably made to work hard seven days a week. God had delivered them from this bondage. Now He was requiring them to rest on the Sabbath and observe it as a holy day. We all need one day away from the work of the week, when we can have our bodies and souls refreshed.

#### **E. Honor Your Parents: v. 16**

“Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” As Paul observes in Ephesians 6:2, this is the first of the Ten Commandments that has a promise attached to it.

Lack of respect for parents has become exceedingly common today, and society is paying a high price for it in

youth crimes and destruction. No nation can function as it should unless its children have respect for their parents.

Promiscuity and divorce have compounded the problem. Millions of children in America do not have the privilege of living in a home with both parents, and the situation is getting worse every year. What effective application can we hope for this commandment to have? Parents and children must cooperate in making the fifth commandment a part of life.

#### **F. Don't Murder: v. 17**

“Thou shalt not kill” (KJV) has been abused by using it as an argument against capital punishment and even against the killing of animals. The latter, of course, is ridiculous. The Mosaic law specifically ordered the killing of animals for sacrifice. And capital punishment was also prescribed for several offenses.

The best translation, then, is “You shall not murder” (NASB, NIV). This is the only meaning that fits the context of the Old Testament.

#### **G. Don't Commit Adultery: v. 18**

It is tragically obvious that this commandment is being broken more frequently in our generation than in any previous generation of American history. In fact, adultery is quite respectable in the thinking of too many people today. A lawyer told me years ago that he could not remember when he had heard of a divorce being granted on the grounds of adultery. Yet that was the only ground for divorce and remarriage allowed by Jesus (Matt. 19:9). The present casual attitude toward adultery is a tragic commentary on the looseness of moral thinking.

#### **H. Don't Steal: v. 19**

Stealing is another sin that has become exceedingly common in our day. All of us are paying higher prices in department stores and grocery stores

because of the theft that goes on massively every day. The reported figures of the annual theft in stores is beyond our ability to grasp. Even wealthy people have been caught taking expensive clothing and other objects surreptitiously.

But the Ten Commandments are still in force. And one day countless millions of people will have to answer at the judgment for their sin of stealing.

### I. Don't Give False Witness: v. 20

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

Adam Clarke comments: "Not only false oaths, to deprive a man of his life or of his right, are here prohibited, but all whispering, talebearing, slander, and calumny; in a word, whatever is deposed as a truth, which is false in fact, and tends to injure another in his goods, person, or character, is against the spirit and letter of this law. Suppressing the truth when known, by which a person may be defrauded of his property or his good name, or lie under injuries or disabilities which a discovery of the truth would have prevented, is also a crime against this law" (*Commentary*, p. 127).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. It is often suggested that the first four commandments were written on Tablet I and the last six on Tablet II. Why?
2. What idols might tempt church members?
3. Is it possible for Christians to take God's name in vain?
4. How are we to observe the Sabbath day?
5. How can we help people to honor their parents?
6. How can we avoid wrong desire?

### J. Don't Covet Others' Possessions: v. 21

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." This commandment is broken every day by many men—and not just in Hollywood!

One is not even to "desire" his neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, "or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Covetousness (wrong desire) is heavily condemned in the New Testament. In Colossians 3:5 Paul labels it "idolatry." Wrong desire leads us into sin more than any other one thing. If we would safeguard our actions and words, we must watch carefully our desires.

### III. THE TWO STONE TABLETS: Deuteronomy 5:22

"These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me." The Ten Commandments were the basic law.

The story of the stone tablets is an interesting one, as told in the Book of Exodus. Moses had spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai, alone with God (24:18), receiving the directions for building the tabernacle and caring for the worship there (cc. 25-31). Then we read: "When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the hand of God" (31:18).

When Moses returned to camp and found the people worshipping the golden calf Aaron had made, he broke the two stone tablets (32:19). Later, under divine command, he chiseled out two stone tablets (34:1-4) and took them up the mountain for another forty-day stay (34:28). The Ten Commandments were written on them there.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Perhaps the greatest prophet of our time is Billy Graham. To uncounted thousands of people he has trumpeted the message: "The Ten Commandments are still in force, and we are all going to be judged by them in the final day."

Many thousands are turning to Christ under his almost nightly invita-

tion. We can be very grateful that Billy Graham stresses moral demands and not just emotional response.

If there ever was a day when the Ten Commandments needed to be recalled, it is right now. May God bless every effort to this end!



3. The other ten spies doubted God and led the people into disobedience.
4. Which way are we affecting those around us?

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. NECESSITY OF OBEYING

#### GOD'S LAWS:

#### Deuteronomy 6:1-3

##### A. The Divine Command: v. 1

"These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess." We meet this kind of language frequently here. Moses certainly believed in the principle of repetition for emphasis.

Though Moses could not cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, he was very solicitous for the Israelites' future welfare there. From his experience with them in the desert for forty years, he was only too painfully conscious of how prone they were to forget the Lord and fail to keep His commands. Ten times they had grumbled against the Lord and His servant. Only Moses' intercession for them saved them from destruction. It is no wonder, then, that he repeatedly warned them to be faithful.

##### B. Long Life: v. 2

"So that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, so that you may enjoy long life."

Moses was concerned for the ongoing generations in the land of Canaan. He realized that each generation must teach the next generation to fear the Lord, or there would inevitably be a lapse in obedience, with the consequent judgment on the nation.

Parents have a serious responsibility. If one generation fails in its duty,

many generations may live in sin and suffer for it.

Long life was considered one of God's best blessings in those days. Living the way God wants us to live is one of the secrets of enjoying long life. Of course we realize that many godly people die rather young, from various causes.

##### C. Prosperity: v. 3

"Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you."

"Go well with you" means different things to different people. Here the first thing mentioned is "increase greatly." Having many children was considered at that time as a special sign of divine favor. In the "population explosion" of our day that is hardly a desirable blessing!

The picture here is largely that of material prosperity, and that is what most people now prefer, even too many Christians. But we should seek spiritual prosperity. We should be concerned to "increase greatly" in our own souls, and also in the winning of other souls. We should be more concerned to have many spiritual children than physical children.

### II. CONSTANT ATTENTION TO GOD'S LAWS:

#### Deuteronomy 6:4-9

##### A. The Unique Oneness of God: v.

4

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." The Hebrew here can be translated several different ways, as

the three alternative renderings in the New International Version footnote indicate.

The first word, "hear," is in the Hebrew: *shema*. So the Jews refer to this passage (vv. 4-5) as the "Shema" (pronounced She-mah, with short "e" and the accent on the last syllable). These words (v. 4) were used as a call to worship at the beginning of the morning and evening prayers in the temple. And even today every devout Jew is supposed to recite the Shema twice daily. It is considered the most important statement in their sacred Scriptures (our Old Testament).

The main emphasis here is on the unity of Yahweh. The true God is one deity, not many gods as the pagans held. In the New Testament the doctrine of the Trinity, a Triunity, is clearly developed, beginning at the baptism of Jesus. But in the Old Testament the three persons are not fully distinguished.

### B. The Greatest Commandment: v. 5

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

While Jesus was in Jerusalem during Passion Week a teacher of the law asked Him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus' answer was: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:28-30).

Ezra Gould says about this command: "Love is the duty of man toward God, and this is in itself a revelation of the nature of God. It is only one who loves who demands love, and only one in whom love is supreme demands love as the supreme duty. He requires of men what is consonant with his own being" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 232).

It will be noted that in Jesus' statement "and with all your mind" is added

to what the Hebrew says. Some have thought that Jesus Himself added this, but the expression (in Greek) is found in our oldest manuscript of the Septuagint (Vaticanus, fourth century), and Jesus may have just combined the two. Gould makes this helpful comment: "*Kardia* (heart) is the general word for the inner man; *psyche* is the soul, the life-principle, *dianoia* is the mind, and *ischys* is the spiritual strength. There is no attempt at classification, or exactness of statement, but simply to express in a strong way the whole being" (*Mark*, p. 232). That is, the basic meaning is: "You must love the Lord your God with your whole being!" He is one, undivided, and we must be one in Him.

For good measure Jesus went on and added "the second" commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). These two sum up the Ten Commandments. It seems altogether probable that the first of the two stone tablets (see last week's lesson) contained the first four commandments, which cover our duties to God, while the second tablet contained the last six, which deal with our duties to our fellow man.

### C. God's Commandments in Our Hearts: v. 6

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts." They should be memorized by our minds and treasured in our hearts. They should be understood by us intellectually, but they should especially be loved by us devotedly. If these commands are firmly impressed on our hearts, we will not go astray.

Too many people just have religion in their heads. They are catechized, confirmed, and cultivated intellectually. But there is no impact of God's Word on their hearts. The Word must be loved by both the mind and the heart if it is to be real to an individual.

It takes time, attention, and purpose if spiritual truths are going to reach our hearts effectively. We must put forth the effort to accomplish this.

**D. Living Close to God's Word: v.**

7

"Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

On "teach diligently" (NIV, "impress") Adam Clarke notes that the Hebrew is "*Shinantam*, from *shanan*, 'to repeat, iterate, or do a thing again and again'; hence to whet or sharpen any instrument, which is done by reiterated friction or grinding. We see here the spirit of this divine injunction. God's testimonies must be taught to our children, and the utmost diligence must be used to make them understand them. This is a most difficult task; and it requires much patience, much prudence, much judgment, and much piety in the parents, to enable them to do this good, this most important work, in the best and most effectual manner." On talking about the divine commandments at home, Clarke says: "You shall have religion at home, as well as in the Temple and Tabernacle." On walking along the road he comments: "You shall be religious abroad as well as at home, and not be ashamed to own God wherever you are." On the last part of the verse he observes: "You shall begin and end the day with God, and thus religion will be the great business of your life" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 209).

**E. Keeping His Words Before Us:**

v. 8

"Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads."

The Jews took these words very literally and fastened to their arms and foreheads what are called "phylacteries." Devout Jews often wear them while praying, as one can still see at the West Wall—formerly called the Wailing Wall—on the west side of the temple area in Old Jerusalem. They pick them up from a table and fasten them to their arm or forehead as they go forward to pray.

Adam Clarke describes an original phylactery which he had before him as he wrote. It was a piece of vellum (leather) about eighteen inches long and an inch and a quarter wide, and contained four compartments, unequal in size. In the first was written the first ten verses of Exodus 13; in the second, verses 11 to 16 of the same chapter; in the third, Deuteronomy 6:4-9; and in the fourth, Deuteronomy 11:13-21. These thirty verses were regularly used in the phylacteries.

**F. Constant Exposure to Them: v.**

9

"Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." This the Jews also did literally. This was done primarily to remind them constantly of these important commandments of God.

The modern counterpart to this practice in Christian homes is the custom of having mottos on the walls. Usually they consist of wise spiritual reminders, such as this one in a family dining room.

Christ is the Unseen Guest at every meal,  
the Silent Listener to every conversation.

Unfortunately, in our sophisticated age, one sees these less frequently. They were a helpful influence on me as a young Christian in our farm home.

**III. DANGER OF FORGETTING THE LORD:**

Deuteronomy 6:10-12

**A. Abundance in the Land: vv. 10-11**

In the spiritual realm it has usually been true that the perils of prosperity are greater than the perils of poverty. Poor people often—though not always—pray to God for help. But those who have material abundance find it easy to succumb to an attitude of com-



placency and self-sufficiency. The very things that God has graciously given them become a snare to them.

Moses saw the danger, and so he talked to the Israelites about it: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant. . . ." In a sense God was giving them these abundant material blessings to compensate for the years of unpaid slave labor in Egypt.

#### B. Warning Against Forgetting: v. 12

"Then when you eat and are satisfied [v. 11], be careful that you do not forget the LORD; who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Adam Clarke writes: "In earthly prosperity men are apt to forget heavenly things. While the animal senses have everything they can wish, it is difficult for the soul to urge its way to heaven; the animal man is happy, and the desires of the soul are absorbed in those of the flesh. God knows this well; and therefore, in His love to man, makes comparative poverty and frequent affliction his general lot. Should not every soul therefore magnify God for this lot in life? 'Before I was afflicted,' says David, 'I went astray'; and had it not been for poverty and affliction, as instruments in the hands of God's grace, multitudes of souls now happy in heaven would have been wretched in hell" (*Commentary*, p. 210). The way to avoid this is to keep close to God every day.

#### IV. DANGER OF IDOLATRY: Deuteronomy 6:13-15

##### A. Serve Only the Lord: v. 13

"Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name."

It should be noted again that the word *fear* does not mean "be afraid of," but rather "have a reverential trust in." It involves the idea of being obedient to.

While the word "only" after "serve him" is not in the Hebrew text, it is in the Septuagint. And it was the Septuagint that Jesus quoted in Matthew 4:10 and Luke 4:8, when tempted by the devil. The context here also seems to require it. It is not just a matter of serving the true God but of serving *only* Him.

##### B. Avoid Other Gods: v. 14

"Do not follow other gods, the gods of the people around you." Some people in ancient times, as well as in modern times, have worshiped several gods. But this is clearly forbidden here.

##### C. Consequence of Disobedience: v. 15

"For the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land."

Adam Clarke puts it this way: "Jehovah has betrothed you to himself as a bride to her husband. Do not be unfaithful, else that love wherewith He has now distinguished you shall assume the form of jealousy, and so divorce and consume you" (*Commentary*, p. 210).

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can the church and the home combine to save our children?
2. What is the price of spiritual prosperity?
3. How can we maintain constant loyalty to the one true God?
4. What is the danger of self-sufficiency?
5. How can it be avoided?
6. Why are daily prayer and Bible reading essential?



## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

In our farm home, when I was a child, Bible reading and prayer held a central place. No matter what the weather or pressing work, family worship came every morning after breakfast. Father read a chapter of God's Word. Then he led in prayer, followed by my mother and all six children in order of our age.

The result? Of those six children, three went as missionaries to India, and the other three of us have been active in Christian work. It pays to put God first in the home and teach His Word to our children.

July 19, 1981

## GOD CHOSE ISRAEL

DEVOTIONAL READING	Nehemiah 1:4-11b
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<p><b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>When God Chooses Us</i></p> <p><b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>God Chooses Us</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Deuteronomy 6:16-7:26; 9:4-5</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Deuteronomy 6:20-25; 7:6-11</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>You are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession.</i> Deuteronomy 7:6</p>
CHILDREN	<p><b>Topic:</b> <i>A New Leader</i></p> <p><b>Background Scripture:</b> Numbers 27:12-23; Joshua 1:1-6</p> <p><b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Joshua 1:1-6</p> <p><b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>The LORD your God is with you wherever you go.</i> Joshua 1:9</p>
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<p>July 13 M.: A People Holy to the Lord. Deut. 6:16-25</p> <p>July 14 T.: Chosen in Love. Deut. 7:1-11</p> <p>July 15 W.: Chosen for Blessing. Deut. 7:12-16</p> <p>July 16 T.: The Lord Is in Your Midst. Deut. 7:17-26; 9:4-5</p> <p>July 17 F.: "Fear Not, I Will Help You." Isa. 41:8-13</p> <p>July 18 S.: We Are the Lord's. Isa. 44:1-5</p> <p>July 19 S.: A Prayer for God's Chosen People. Neh. 1</p>
LESSON AIM	To help us realize the privileges and responsibilities of being chosen by God.
LESSON SETTING	<p><b>Time:</b> about 1400 B.C.</p> <p><b>Place:</b> east of the Jordan River</p>
LESSON OUTLINE	<p><b>God Chose Israel</b></p> <p><b>I. Obedience and Blessing:</b> Deuteronomy 6:16-19</p> <p>A. Do Not Test the Lord: v. 16</p> <p>B. Keep His Commands: v. 17</p> <p>C. Do What Is Right: v. 18a</p> <p>D. Enjoy God's Blessing: vv. 18b-19</p> <p><b>II. Informing the Children:</b> Deuteronomy 6:20-25</p> <p>A. Son's Question: v. 20</p> <p>B. Divine Deliverance: v. 21</p> <p>C. Plagues on Egypt: v. 22</p>

- D. Divine Purpose: v. 23
- E. Condition of Blessing: v. 24
- F. Obedience Is Righteousness: v. 25

### III. Divine Choice of Israel: Deuteronomy 7:6-11

- A. Chosen As His People: v. 6
- B. Not Because of Size: v. 7
- C. Because of Love: v. 8
- D. The Faithful God: v. 9
- E. Need of Obedience: vv. 10-11

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR ADULTS

The devotional reading for today, Nehemiah 1:4-11, forms a good introduction to our lesson, which emphasizes the importance of God's people obeying God's commands. We glimpse here the results of disobedience.

Nehemiah had just learned of the sad conditions in far-away Jerusalem. Burdened by the bad news, he sat down and wept, fasted, and prayed.

Appropriately, he addressed God as "the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands" (v. 5). Then Nehemiah prayed: "Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel" (v. 6). He confessed the sins of his people and acknowledged they had been wicked and disobedient.

Then he reminded the Lord of His instructions through Moses. God had warned that if the Israelites were unfaithful they would be scattered among the nations, and this had happened. But God had also promised that if the people repented He would restore them to Jerusalem. Nehemiah prayed that the promise would be fulfilled.

#### SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION FOR YOUTH

How thankful we ought to be that God chooses us. We did not first choose Him, but He first chose us. He did so at creation, and even more significantly at the cross.

To complete the circle and bring us into the fellowship of the family of God, we have to choose Christ as our Savior and Lord. Then we are "born again" as God's children.

God's choice of Israel must always remain a marvel to us. But what about His choice of us? We certainly did not deserve it! By His divine grace God saved us. That should make our hearts full of gratitude and love for God's goodness. And we should live out that gratitude in praise to Him and service for others.

#### CONCEPTS FOR CHILDREN

1. God needs leaders for His people.
2. We should be ready to let God use us in any way He wants to.
3. We should also prepare ourselves to be used in the largest possible way.
4. We have to be good followers before we can be good leaders.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. OBEDIENCE AND BLESSING:

Deuteronomy 6:16-19

#### A. Do Not Test the Lord: v. 16

The King James Version says, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted him in Massah." But James tells us: "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13). Temptation means enticement to do something wrong. So the correct translation here is, "Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah" (NIV). We can "put... God to the test" (NASB), but we cannot tempt Him.

How did the Israelites test God at Massah? The story is told in Exodus 17:1-7. At Rephidim, in the desert, there was no water for the people to drink. "So they quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink'" (v. 2).

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

In desperation Moses cried out to the Lord. Then the Lord instructed him to strike the rock at Horeb, and water would flow out—a type of Christ, struck on the cross for us. Moses called the place "Massah" (Hebrew for "testing"), because there the people had tested the Lord (v. 7).

#### B. Keep His Commands: v. 17

"Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you." This is the main, recurring emphasis in the Book of Deuteronomy. We have had it about a dozen times already, and we will run into it often again.

Obedience to God's law is required of all of God's people. That is why we need to read the Bible faithfully, to find out His commands. We can be thankful that we are not obligated, as Christians, to keep all the minute rules and regulations of the ceremonial law spelled out in Exodus and Leviticus. But we *are*

required to keep the great law of love, which is Christ's law for us. And we need to read the New Testament constantly to get the guidance we need for applying that law in our daily lives. We find it spelled out for us in the Sermon on the Mount, which we need to read over and over again. But the Epistles of the New Testament also furnish many guidelines for keeping the divine commands.

#### C. Do What Is Right: v. 18a

"Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight." This brief injunction takes in a lot of territory. It applies to every part of life.

First, we have to do what is "right." Basically, this means avoiding all wrong. But it also means doing what is right, or fitting, in every circumstance.

The second adjective, "good," takes us a step further and higher, for goodness is a positive virtue, not a negative one. It involves not only avoidance of wrong but positively doing what is good and kind and helpful. Regarding "goodness" as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), someone has well said, "Goodness is love in action." So if we are going to do what is good in the Lord's sight we must always act in love.

This puts the requirement for us higher than the requirement for the Israelites. But this is not unreasonable, because we have Christ—who is absolute, eternal, infinite love—in our hearts. And that love is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

#### D. Enjoy God's Blessing: vv.

18b-19

The Israelites were to do what was right and good in God's sight, "so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers, thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the LORD said."



Obedience is the price of wellbeing. And this is especially true in our relationship to the Lord. If we want it to "go well" with us, we must fully obey the Lord day by day.

For the Israelites at that time this was especially important. They were right on the verge of entering the land that the Lord had promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But if they were to succeed in going in and taking over the land from its powerful inhabitants, they must be careful to do what was right. Only thus could they have God's supernatural help in occupying the land.

## II. INFORMING THE CHILDREN: Deuteronomy 6:20-25

### A. Son's Question: v. 20

"In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?' . . ."

It was the custom in those days for a son to inquire of his father as to the meaning of certain things connected with their religion (cf. Exod. 13:14). And so the Israelites were told by Moses what answer they should give.

### B. Divine Deliverance: v. 21

In this case the father was to tell his son: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand." The Exodus was an event that the Israelites were never to forget. It marked their beginning as a nation. Throughout the Old Testament we find writers referring to this most significant event in the life of Israel. It was the great moment of their redemption. And so it parallels our individual conversion experience, our deliverance from the slavery of sin.

### C. Plagues on Egypt: v. 22

"Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders. The first plague was that of turning the water of

the sacred Nile River into blood (Exod. 7:20). The second was sending frogs all over the land of Egypt (8:6). The third was lice on men and animals (8:17). The fourth was flies filling the Egyptian houses, including the royal palace (8:24). The fifth was murrain (9:3). The sixth was boils (9:10). The seventh was hail (9:23). The eighth was a plague of locusts (10:13). The ninth was three days of darkness (10:22).

The tenth plague was the worst of all. At midnight the Lord killed all the firstborn sons in Egypt (12:29). In doing all this He executed judgment on all the gods of the Egyptians (12:12). The God of Israel showed that He was far more powerful than all the many gods of the pagan nations.

### D. Divine Purpose: v. 23

God did not bring the Israelites out of Egypt to let them perish in the desert. "But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers."

Salvation is not just a deliverance from sin and judgment and eternal punishment. It is an entrance into a new life in Christ, and final, full bliss in heaven. The negative side would be worth far more than anything we do to be saved. But the positive is unending blessing, far beyond all computation.

It has been popular to think of crossing the Jordan as a symbol of death and the Promised Land as a symbol of heaven. But the Book of Joshua shows that the Israelites did more fighting in Canaan than they did in the desert. Many saints of all theological persuasions have described a time when they surrendered their will wholly to God's will and found themselves in the Promised Land of a deeper rest in their souls.

### E. Condition of Blessing: v. 24

"The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today."

Obedience is the price of prosperity. This is true to a great extent in the material realm, but it is completely true in the spiritual realm. How closely and fully we obey God's commands will govern the measure of our spiritual prosperity.

Jesus said: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). How fully and continuously do we do this? Probably most of us would want to pray, "Lord, have mercy on me and help me!"

If we understand the New Testament correctly, our true spirituality is not measured by our fervency or forcefulness but by our love. That means that we should major on love rather than personality-projection. If we want to prosper spiritually, we need to let God's love abound in our lives more and more (I Thess. 3:12-13).

#### F. Obedience Is Righteousness: v. 25

Among the Jews righteousness was defined as full conformity to the law. A "righteous man" was one who obeyed the law.

This seems to find considerable support in this verse: "And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness." At Sinai the age of law was inaugurated. Those who believed in God and obeyed His commandments were saved, as was Abraham.

Under the new covenant (New Testament; the same Greek word means "covenant" and "testament") the picture is a bit different. No one ever kept the law of Moses perfectly—no one except Jesus. When we accept Him as our Savior, His perfect righteousness is imputed to us. So we are saved by *His* righteousness, not ours.

But we are then still obligated to obey the laws of God as interpreted in the New Testament—especially by Jesus in the Gospels, but also by the Holy Spirit in the Epistles. And the law

of love, as we have seen, is supremely Christ's law for us.

### III. DIVINE CHOICE OF ISRAEL: Deuteronomy 7:6-11

#### A. Chosen As His People: v. 6

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."

In the Old Testament the word "holy" has a strong ceremonial sense. Basically it means "set apart to God," and so, "sacred." For that reason, material objects are frequently described as "holy."

In the New Testament we find a strong moral emphasis introduced, with a focus on persons rather than things. If we are set apart to a holy God and are going to enjoy fellowship with Him, then we too must be holy in character, for "what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14).

Out of all the peoples on the earth, God had chosen the Israelites to be His people, "his treasured possession." What a beautiful concept! And if this was true of the descendants of Abraham how much more is it true of those who belong to Christ, the Son of His love.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways may we be guilty of testing the Lord in a bad way?
2. How can we do "what is right and good"?
3. Why do we need to explain religious matters to our children?
4. When should we do it?
5. What does it mean to be God's "treasured possession"?
6. Why did God choose *us*?

**B. Not Because of Size: v. 7**

"The LORD did not set his affection on you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples." Compared to such great nations as Egypt, the Israelites were just a handful of people.

Why, then, did God choose Israel? The next verse gives at least a partial answer.

**C. Because of Love: v. 8**

"But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery. . . ."

Adam Clarke writes: "It was no good in them that induced God to choose them at this time to be His peculiar people: He had His reasons, but these sprang from His infinite goodness. He intended to make a full discovery of His goodness to the world, and this must have a commencement in some particular place, and among some people. He chose that time, and He chose the Jewish people, but not because of their goodness or holiness" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 211). That full revelation of His goodness came in Christ, an Israelite.

**D. The Faithful God: v. 9**

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."

In our study of the Ten Commandments we noted that "showing love to thousands" (5:10) probably meant "to thousands of generations". This verse

would seem to favor that interpretation. The generations would not necessarily have to be consecutive generations of the same families, so there is no time problem involved.

Israel's God, Yahweh, "is God"—the true God, the only God. The pagan deities are not real gods, only the imaginations of corrupt minds.

God will keep His "covenant of love" with all "those who love him and keep his commands." Again we note that love and obedience go together and are essential to our being in covenant relationship to God.

**E. Need of Obedience: vv. 10-11**

In contrast to verse 9 we find this sobering declaration in verse 10:

those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction;  
he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.

The holy God is a God of justice, as well as mercy. Those who deliberately, wilfully reject His free, gracious offer of mercy can only experience His justice.

On the basis of this, Moses pleaded again: "Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today" (v. 11). As we have noted several times, this is the keynote of the Book of Deuteronomy. This was the heavy concern that lay on the heart of Moses as he neared the end of his days as leader of the nation of Israel.

Does this have a message for us today? Some extremists have gone into antinomianism (against law), claiming that we do not have to keep God's laws. But there is a great deal of emphasis in the New Testament on obedience (cf. Matt. 7:21-27).

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**CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

There are two perversions of Christianity that threaten the church of Jesus Christ. One is antinomianism,

which says that Christ kept the law for us, we are not subject to any divine restrictions. In its extreme form it

tends to give license to loose living and even free love.

The other is an overemphasis on emotionalism rather than morality. This can lead to the same results, and has in a few instances. God demands that we be holy, and that, in the New

Testament, is a moral emphasis.

Our safety lies in seeking to obey God's holy laws each day, especially as they are interpreted and applied in the New Testament. There is no substitute for obedience.



July 26, 1981

## COMMITMENT IN WORSHIP

DEVOTIONAL READING	Amos 5:18-24
ADULTS AND YOUTH	<b>Adult Topic:</b> <i>Commitment in Worship</i> <b>Youth Topic:</b> <i>Joy in Obedience</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Deuteronomy 12:1—14:29 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Deuteronomy 12:5-12; 14:27-29 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>You shall rejoice, you and your household, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.</i> Deuteronomy 12:7
CHILDREN	<b>Topic:</b> <i>Crossing the Jordan</i> <b>Background Scripture:</b> Joshua 3—4:7 <b>Scripture Lesson:</b> Joshua 4:1-7 <b>Memory Verse:</b> <i>The LORD is good; his steadfast love endures for ever.</i> Psalm 100:5
DAILY BIBLE READINGS	<b>July 20 M.:</b> A Place to Worship God. Deut. 12:1-14 <b>July 21 T.:</b> Do Not Go After Other Gods. Deut. 13:1-5 <b>July 22 W.:</b> Give a Tithe to God. Deut. 14:22-29 <b>July 23 T.:</b> Worship and Bow Down. Ps. 95:1-7 <b>July 24 F.:</b> Declare His Glory. Ps. 96 <b>July 25 S.:</b> The Lord Reigns. Ps. 99 <b>July 26 S.:</b> True Worship. Amos 5:18-24
LESSON AIM	To help us worship more meaningfully.
LESSON SETTING	<b>Time:</b> about 1400 B.C. <b>Place:</b> east of the Jordan River
LESSON OUTLINE	<b>Commitment in Worship</b> <b>I. Destruction of Pagan Places of Worship:</b> Deuteronomy 12:1-3 <b>II. One Place of Worship:</b> Deuteronomy 12:4-7 A. Not Like the Pagans: v. 4 B. The Place of God's Dwelling: v. 5 C. Offerings and Sacrifices: v. 6 D. A Common Meeting Place: v. 7

**III. God's Chosen Place of Worship: Deuteronomy**

12:8-14

- A. Present Mobile Situation: vv. 8-9
- B. Future Prospect: v. 10
- C. God's Chosen Place: v. 11
- D. Rejoicing Before the Lord: v. 12
- E. No Promiscuous Sacrificing: vv. 13-14

**IV. Worshipping Other Gods: Deuteronomy 13:1-18**

- A. Prophet or Dreamer: vv. 1-5
- B. Relative or Friend: vv. 6-11
- C. One of Their Towns: vv. 12-18

**V. Instructions for Tithing: Deuteronomy 14:22-29**

- A. Tithe of Annual Crops: v. 22
- B. Eating the Tithe at the Chosen Place: v. 23
- C. Provision for Those Far Away: vv. 24-26
- D. Caring for the Levites: v. 27
- E. Tithe Every Three Years: v. 28
- F. Providing for the Needy: v. 29

Moses paid a high price for being the founder of the Hebrew nation and its first leader. In today's lesson he reminds the Israelites of how he had gone up Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. He says, "I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water" (Deut. 9:9).

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai he found the people worshipping the golden calf; so he broke the stone tablets (9:15-17). He reports: "Then once again I fell prostrate before the LORD for forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed . . ." (9:18). He destroyed the golden calf (v. 21).

The Lord told Moses to chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come back up the mountain (10:1). Later Moses reports: "Now I had stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, as I did the first time" (10:10).

There is joy in obedience. If we have any conscience we feel happy when we obey and miserable when we disobey. So why not be obedient?

Worship is a part of our obedience. When we come into the sanctuary on Sunday morning it should be the best time of the week! If we enter into worship properly, we will experience a real joy and peace inside. Then as we join in the congregational singing and listen to the reading of the Scripture, that joy can be increased. Worship should bring us into the presence of God.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS****SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH****CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. Where God guides, God provides.
2. Important religious experiences in our lives should be remembered.

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**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

There is joy in obedience. If we have any conscience we feel happy when we obey and miserable when we disobey. So why not be obedient?

Worship is a part of our obedience. When we come into the sanctuary on Sunday morning it should be the best time of the week! If we enter into worship properly, we will experience a real joy and peace inside. Then as we join in the congregational singing and listen to the reading of the Scripture, that joy can be increased. Worship should bring us into the presence of God.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. Where God guides, God provides.
2. Important religious experiences in our lives should be remembered.



3. That is why the Israelites placed stones as a memorial of crossing the Jordan.
4. We should appreciate our homes.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. DESTRUCTION OF PAGAN PLACES OF WORSHIP: Deuteronomy 12:1-3

Once more Moses sounds the familiar note: "These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land" (v. 1). The Lord was giving them the land of Canaan, but their wellbeing there depended on carefully observing the laws that God had given them at Sinai.

"Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods" (v. 2). Pagan worship took place all over the countryside in Canaan, as it does in many countries of Asia and Africa today. Especially was it found on hilltops and under spreading trees.

God wanted these shrines destroyed, so that the Israelites would not be tempted to fall into idolatry. The best way to avoid being enticed is to get rid of everything that would tempt one to sin.

To be safe, the Israelites were to do a thorough job of demolition. Moses gave the order: "Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places" (v. 3).

These items were all connected with the pagan worship of the Canaanites of that period. On the "altars" they offered sacrifices to their heathen gods. The "sacred stones" were representations of their pagan deities. The "Asherah poles" were connected with the

Canaanitish worship of Ashtaroth (Greek, Astarte; Latin, Venus) a goddess who was particularly appealing to the people of Old Testament times, and even later. Around the temples of this goddess there were groves where licentious worship was carried on. These were to be burned down.

All "idols" were to be cut down, and the "names" of the gods and goddesses were to be wiped out. Moses knew the weakness of the Israelites and so gave strict orders for all the vestiges of paganism to be destroyed.

### II. ONE PLACE OF WORSHIP: Deuteronomy 12:4-7

#### A. Not Like the Pagans: v. 4

"You must not worship the LORD your God in their way." That is, the Israelites were not to have objects of worship scattered around on hilltops and under trees. They were to come reverently to a central place of worship, where divinely appointed priests could supervise their activities.

#### B. The Place of God's Dwelling: v. 5

"But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go."

The final, permanent place of worship for the Israelites, as we all know, was Jerusalem. But that was not chosen until the time of David, about 1000 B.C.

In the intervening four centuries or so, other places filled this role. Moses had just told the Israelites previous to

today's lesson: "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God. . . ; the curse if you disobey. . . . When the LORD your God has brought you into the land. . . , you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses" (11:26-29).

The fulfillment of this command is recorded in Joshua 8:30-33. There we read: "Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel. . . . "There in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written. . . . All Israel. . . were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing those who carried it. . . . Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded. . . ." (vv. 30-33).

In the opening chapters of I Samuel we find that the tabernacle, containing the ark of the Lord, was located at Shiloh (I Sam. 1:3). It is called "the house of the LORD at Shiloh" (1:24). This is where the boy Samuel ministered before the Lord and received his call (2:11, 18; 3:1-21). It was the central place of worship for many years. Then David chose Jerusalem, and Solomon built the temple there.

### C. Offerings and Sacrifices: v. 6

Concerning this central place of worship Moses said: "There bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

The pagan Canaanites offered their sacrifices at altars on hilltops and under trees almost anywhere. But the Israelites were forbidden to offer animal sacrifices at any place except the central location chosen by God for that purpose. Also their tithes and offerings were to be brought to the same place.

### D. A Common Meeting Place: v. 7

"There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you." Eating has always been a symbol of fellowship. In the happy fellowship of eating together we can rejoice in God's blessing. It is a privilege and a duty.

## III. GOD'S CHOSEN PLACE OF WORSHIP:

### Deuteronomy 12:8-14

#### A. Present Mobile Situation: vv. 8-9

"You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit, since you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you." Evidently things were somewhat at "loose ends," because the Israelites had not yet come into their permanent possession. But things would be different after they had finally settled in the land.

#### B. Future Prospect: v. 10

So Moses said: "But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety." At the present time they were surrounded by enemies. But when they had finally settled safely in the land of promise they would be expected to inaugurate a regular system of worship that could be carried on for the good of all the people.

#### C. God's Chosen Place: v. 11

"Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name—there you are to bring everything I command you; your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD."

We have already noted that the place the Lord chose as His dwelling was Jerusalem. Isaiah speaks of "the LORD almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion" (8:18). In Joel 3:17 we read:

"Then you will know that I, the LORD your God,  
dwell in Zion, my holy hill.  
Jerusalem will be holy;  
never again will foreigners invade her."

And Joel ends his prophecy with these words: "The LORD dwells in Zion!"

Jerusalem was the place of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, so it holds a unique place among all the cities of the world. It is significant that the final dwelling place of God with men is called "the Holy City, the new Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:2-3).

#### D. Rejoicing Before the Lord: v. 12

When the Israelites had settled in the land and established God's chosen place as their center of worship, it would be a place of joy, not solemnity. Moses said: "And there rejoice before the LORD your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own."

It is unfortunate that too often children and young people are "turned off" by church services because they are so solemn. Worship should be a joyful experience for all who participate. When we think of all that God has done for us, we should rejoice!

#### E. No Promiscuous Sacrificing: vv. 13-14

Just to be sure that they did not forget, Moses again reminded the Israelites: "Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command

you." If only the Israelites had heeded this warning in their successive generations!

### IV. WORSHIPING OTHER GODS: Deuteronomy 13:1-18

#### A. Prophet or Dreamer: vv. 1-5

"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder" and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he then says, 'Let us follow other gods . . . and . . . worship them'" still he is not to be believed or obeyed (vv. 1-2). "The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him" (vv. 3-4). Such a false prophet was to be put to death (v. 5).

In the history of Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, we read of false prophets who led the people astray. In the time of Elijah, the true prophet of the Lord, there were Jezebel's false prophets who deceived Ahab.

Performing spectacular, seemingly supernatural stunts is no proof that a person is speaking for the Lord. We are told to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (I John 4:1).

#### B. Relative or Friend: vv. 6-11

"If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' . . . do not yield to him or listen to him. . . . You must certainly put him to death. . . . Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again" (vv. 6-11).

This shows what a heinous sin it was to try to turn anyone away from the Lord. The most important thing in the world is to serve Him, and anything or anyone who would lead us astray should be cut off immediately. Our loyalty to



the true God must always take first place in our lives, and nothing must be tolerated that would threaten that.

In these days of apostasy from the faith, we must guard ourselves carefully. It will pay to be true to God, no matter what the cost.

### C. One of Their Towns: vv. 12-18

If it was reported that one of the Israelite towns had gone into idolatry, a careful investigation was to be made (v. 12-14). If the report was found to be true, the whole town was to be destroyed, both people and livestock (v. 15). It was to remain a ruin, never rebuilt (v. 16).

The drastic action prescribed in this chapter seems to us today to be rather extreme. But we must remember that this was before Christ came, and God had to deal with the Israelites by law rather than New Testament grace. Justice had to be the order of the day.

There is another factor to be considered. Suppose these instructions had been carried out—what would have been the history of Israel? Would there have been no apostasy, and so no captivity?

## V. INSTRUCTIONS FOR TITHING: Deuteronomy 14:22-29

### A. Tithe of Annual Crops: v. 22

“Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.” In the land of Canaan the Israelites were an agricultural people. Basically, this was their only source of income, so they were to give a tenth of their harvest each year.

### B. Eating the Tithe at the Chosen Place: v. 23

At first sight, this seems to be a strange command. Weren't they supposed to pay their tithe, not eat it?

Adam Clarke gives the necessary explanation. He comments: “Meaning the second tithe, which themselves

were to eat, for there was a first tithe that was given to the Levites, out of which they paid a tenth part to the priests, Num. xviii. 24-28; Neh. x. 37-38. Then of that which remained, the owners separated a second tithe, which they ate before the Lord the first and second year” (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 215). This was a very gracious provision on God's part.

### C. Provision for Those Far Away: vv. 24-26

If someone lived too far away from the central place of worship, had abundant crops under the Lord's blessing, and so couldn't very well carry all his tithe to the house of God, then he was allowed to exchange his tithe materials for money. He could take this money to the place of worship and there exchange it in turn for whatever he wanted to buy to eat. “Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice” (v. 26).

### D. Caring for the Levites: v. 27

“And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own.” The whole tribe of Levi was set aside to serve the Lord. The priests were all from this tribe, with the rest of the

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why should we attend Sunday worship regularly?
2. What would our country be like without churches?
3. How should we support our church?
4. Why is the tithe necessary?
5. What should we do now to help the needy?
6. How should pastors (Levites) be supported?



Levites acting as their assistants and helpers (cf. 10:8-9).

But Joseph's descendants were divided into two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. So that still left twelve tribes to receive allotments of land. The Levites lived in specified cities and received their support from tithes and offerings.

#### E. Tithe Every Three Years: v. 28

"At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns." As we noted in the quotation from Adam Clarke, the owners could eat the second tithe at the central place of worship for two consecutive years. But on the third year they were to give it to the Levites and to the poor.

#### F. Providing for the Needy: v. 29

"So that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

There are many humane provisions in the law of Moses, and this is one of them. Every three years bountiful supplies were to be made available to those in need. This included the aliens, for the Israelites were always to remember that they were once aliens in Egypt. Orphans and widows also got a special treat.

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### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Many people feel that tithing was instituted as a part of the Mosaic law and so Christians are not bound by it. But tithing did not begin at Sinai and it did not end at Calvary. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek half a millennium before the law was given at Sinai (Heb. 7:4-10).

From most of us the government collects about 20 percent in taxes.

Should we grumble about paying 10 percent to the Lord?

Paying our tithe is simply an acknowledgment that we belong to the Lord. The person who refuses to pay a tithe denies this ownership. Deuteronomy 14:29 says that God will bless those who are faithful in paying their tithe.

August 2, 1981

## GOD DESIRES JUSTICE

### DEVOTIONAL READING

Isaiah 55:1-9

### ADULTS AND YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God Desires Justice*

**Youth Topic:** *Do Justice*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 16:18—17:20; 24:1-22

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 24:10-15, 17-19

**Memory Verse:** *Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God gives you.* Deuteronomy 16:20

### CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Covenant Renewal*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 29:1-15; Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14—24:1, 31

**Scripture Lesson:** Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14—24:1

**Memory Verse:** *As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.* Joshua 24:15

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS

**July 27 M.:** Provisions for Justice, Deut. 16:18-17:1

**July 28 T.:** Bases for Determining Justice. Deut. 17:2-13

**July 29 W.:** Kings Must Be Just. Deut. 17:14-20

**July 30 T.:** Justice Tempered with Mercy. Deut. 24:6-7, 10-22

**July 31 F.:** Praise for God's Justice and Righteousness. Ps 89:14-18

**Aug. 1 S.:** Justice and the Messianic King. Isa. 9:2-7

**Aug. 2 S.:** The Rule of the Messiah. Isa. 11:1-9

### LESSON AIM

To enforce the divine requirement of justice.

### LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 1400 B.C.

**Place:** east of the Jordan River

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### God Desires Justice

**I. Appointment of Judges:** Deuteronomy 16:18-20

A. In Every Town: v. 18

B. No Perversion of Justice: v. 19

C. Follow Justice: v. 20

**II. Supreme Court of Justice: Deuteronomy 17:8-13**

- A. Difficult Cases: v. 8
- B. Personnel of Supreme Court: v. 9
- C. Submission to Supreme Court: vv. 10-13

**III. Regulations Regarding a King: Deuteronomy 17:14-20**

- A. Choice of a King: vv. 14-15
- B. Limitations on the King: vv. 16-17
- C. Admonition to the King: vv. 18-20

**IV. Kind Treatment of Others: Deuteronomy 24:10-15**

- A. Poor Neighbor: vv. 10-13
- B. Hired Man: vv. 14-15

**V. Justice to All: Deuteronomy 24:16-18**

- A. Fathers and Son: v. 16
- B. Aliens, Orphans, and Widows: vv. 17-18

**VI. Generosity to the Needy: Deuteronomy 24:19-22**

- A. Sheaves in the Field: v. 19
- B. Fruit on the Trees: vv. 20-22

We have noted the emphasis in the Ten Commandments on observing the Sabbath. But there was not only a weekly Sabbath; there was also a sabbatical year. Two things took place during this: the cancellation of debts (15:1-11) and the freeing of slaves (15:12-18).

Moses instructed the people: "At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts" (15:1). This applied only to loans made to fellow Israelites (vv. 2-3). Therefore no Israelite would ever be in debt more than seven years—a kind provision for the poor.

Moses also said: "If a fellow Hebrew, a man or woman, is sold to you and he serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free" (v. 12). The departing slave was also to be loaded with provisions to help him get started again (vv. 13-15). So no Hebrew would be a slave more than seven years.

If the slave said that he did not want to leave because he loved his master and family, then he could become a "love-slave" for life (vv. 16-17). That should be our relationship to Christ.

A basic requirement for life is to do justice. God requires that we do no less.

We are all painfully aware that there is a great deal of injustice in the world today. But we must make sure that we do not contribute to it. We cannot straighten out everybody else, but we can see that we go straight.

What is needed, of course, is a revival of true Christianity. Where Jesus is Lord, there will be justice. So,

SUGGESTED  
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besides being fair and honest ourselves, the best way we can contribute to justice is to pray and work to win souls to Christ.

Another area in which we can contribute to justice is in being kind to the poor, so today's lesson suggests.

1. From time to time we need to renew our covenant with God.
2. We should work together as Christian families.
3. We can claim many promises God makes to us.
4. We should also make promises to Him and keep them.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES:

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

#### A. In Every Town: v. 18

"Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly."

The Hebrew word for "judges" is *shophetim*. Adam Clarke says that they "were probably the same as our magistrates." The Hebrew word for "officials" is *shoterim* (*im* is the masculine plural ending in Hebrew). Clarke says that these "seem to have been the same as our sergeants, whose office it was to go into the houses, shops, etc., and examine weights, measures, and the civil conduct of the people. When they found anything amiss, they brought the person offending before the magistrate, and he was punished by the officer on the spot" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 216).

#### B. No Perversion of Justice: v. 19

The previous verse says that the judges and officials were to "judge the people fairly." Moses goes on to say here: "Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous."

The practice of bribing judges and officials has been going on from time

immemorial, and it is still carried on around the world. I remember sitting in the outer waiting room in a consulate far from home trying to get a visa because of a shift in travel plans. The secretary kept coming to me every few minutes to assure me I could see the consul. I was painfully aware that if I slipped him a five dollar bill I would probably be in the consul's office inside of two minutes. Instead I waited for three hours. It wasn't the amount of money that concerned me, but the moral principle involved. God hates bribes and partiality.

#### C. Follow Justice: v. 20

"Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you."

The reason we have wars between countries and rebellions within countries around the world is because of injustice. The coming kingdom of Christ is called a kingdom of righteousness and peace—of peace because of righteousness. Because of all the injustice and unrighteousness (almost equivalent terms in meaning) in nations everywhere, we have strife and unrest frequently erupting.

What can we do about it? The first and most important answer is, pray! Only God can overrule to straighten things out. But we are to use our influence in the direction of righteousness



and also in helping to elect honest officials.

## II. SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE:

Deuteronomy 17:8-13

### A. Difficult Cases: v. 8

"If cases come before your courts that are too difficult for you to judge—whether bloodshed, lawsuits or assaults—take them to the place the LORD your God will choose."

This is in line with what we saw back in the first chapter of Deuteronomy. There we found that Moses had to get some help in administering justice. So he appointed tribal officials to handle ordinary cases of dispute (1:9-15). He charged these judges with the same admonition as we have seen in chapter 16: "Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly. . . . Do not show partiality in judging" (1:16-17). Then he added: "Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it" (1:17b).

### B. Personnel of Supreme Court: v. 9

"Go to the priests, who are Levites, and to the judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict."

Up to this time Moses had been not only the chief justice of the supreme court of Israel; he was the whole court! There was no appeal beyond his jurisdiction.

It must be remembered that Moses was from the tribe of Levi; both his father and mother were Levites (Exod. 2:1). His brother Aaron was the first high priest in Israel. Moses also acted as God's prophet, giving God's messages to the people. At the same time he was the civil leader of the nation and supreme judge. So he combined in his one person three functions: prophet, priest, and judge. He had no successor filling all these roles. For Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8); Hoshea

and Joshua (14:6) are the same man. So Joshua could never function as priest.

Now we learn that the supreme court in Israel was composed of the priests and "the judge who is in office at that time." Apparently he was to act as chief justice, with the priests functioning as associate justices. They would be expected to seek and find divine guidance for settling these difficult cases.

It is in the Book of Judges that we find a single judge as leader of Israel. Moses was anticipating that later regime.

### C. Submission to Supreme Court: vv. 10-13

"You must act according to the decisions they give you at the place the LORD will choose. Be careful to do everything they direct you to do. Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left" (vv. 10-11).

No nation can function properly without some supreme authority. Once more we note that the government of Israel was at this time not an autocracy, democracy, or monarchy. It was a theocracy. The judge and the priests were to seek God's guidance in judging cases, and the priests were to teach and enforce the law that was divinely given at Sinai. So the ultimate authority was God Himself. But He acted through His appointed representatives—the judge and the priests.

It must be remembered that the first so-called "judges" in the Book of Judges were appointed by God (Judges 3:9, 15). They were first of all deliverers and then acted as judges. Meanwhile the priests functioned at the tabernacle.

There was to be no discounting of the decisions of this supreme court. Moses warned the people: "The man who shows contempt for the judge or for the priest who stands ministering there to the LORD your God must be put to death. You must purge the evil from Israel. All the people will hear and be

afraid, and will not be contemptuous again" (vv. 12-13).

Today there is considerable discussion about the matter of capital punishment. Right at the moment it is a live issue in several states (including Florida, where I am writing, and where the first execution in years has recently taken place). Opponents of capital punishment claim that it is no deterrent to crime. But it is interesting to note that verse 13 definitely presents it as such. The same thing is true in 13:10-11. There is no question but that the Old Testament does present capital punishment as a deterrent to crime.

### III. REGULATIONS REGARDING A KING:-

Deuteronomy 17:14-20

#### A. Choice of a King: vv. 14-15

Moses' prediction in verse 14 was fulfilled to the very letter, as recorded in I Samuel 8:4-5. There were to be two restrictions in the choice of the person: He must be one whom the Lord chose, and he must be an Israelite. We find this to be the case in the selection of the first two kings, Saul and David.

#### B. Limitations on the King: vv. 16-17

There were three limitations on the King: he must not "acquire great numbers of horses for himself" or "take many wives" or "accumulate large amounts of silver and gold."

As is well known, Solomon broke all three of these commands. The warning was given here that having "many wives" would result in the king's heart being led astray (v. 17), and that is exactly what happened to Solomon.

#### C. Admonition to the King: vv. 18-20

Over against these prohibitions there was an important positive command: When the king took the throne he

was to "write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law. . . . It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life." If Solomon had done this, he would not have failed so dismally.

### IV. KIND TREATMENT OF OTHERS:

Deuteronomy 24:10-15

#### A. Poor Neighbor: vv. 10-13

Courtesy and kindness to the poor are enjoined here in a very beautiful way. The first command was: "When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge. Stay outside and let the man to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you" (vv. 10-11). This pledge—or, as we would call it today, security for the loan—might well be a piece of bedding or an article of clothing. Perhaps the man's wife would protest or shed tears over the temporary loss. The creditor was not to embarrass the debtor or his family by entering the house. It was a beautiful touch of courtesy.

Furthermore, "If the man is poor, do not go to sleep with his pledge in your possession. Return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God" (vv. 12-13). The very poor did not have any blankets to use at night. They had to sleep in their cloaks that they wore in the daytime, in order to keep warm. How could a prosperous man, who enjoyed all the comforts of a well furnished home, sleep with a good conscience when he knew his neighbor was too cold to sleep—all because of the cloak the prosperous man had lying idly in his home as the security for a loan?

Here we see divine love shining through in a very practical way: not just a declaration, "God is love," but a practical proof of it in providing for the care of the poor.

If we claim to have that divine love

in our hearts, then we too must be concerned for the needy around us—and especially avoid adding to their suffering when we can prevent it. “Like father, like son” should always be true in the case of children of the heavenly Father. We should be thoughtful of others.

### B. Hired Man: vv. 14–15

“Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.”

The prosperous man who hired the worker had plenty of money on hand for emergencies. Furthermore he had abundant supplies of food for his family. It might never occur to him that his hired man had no food at home and no money with which to buy some. If he did not receive his wages that evening, his family would have no supper and would go to bed hungry.

We need to guard against being oblivious to needy situations that are right in front of us. We cannot feed all the hungry of the world—though we can give money to Compassion, Food for the Hungry, Care, and other such organizations. But where the need confronts us, we should help.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is bribing so widely practiced?
2. Why do we have to have courts of justice?
3. What should be our attitude toward governmental authority?
4. What should be the relationship of employers and employees?
5. How should we treat orphans and widows?
6. How can we show a generous spirit?

## V. JUSTICE TO ALL: Deuteronomy 24:16–18

### A. Fathers and Son: v. 16

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.”

This is divine justice. We find the principle discussed at length and vividly illustrated in Ezekiel 18.

People were quoting the proverb (v. 2):

“The fathers eat sour grapes,  
and the children’s teeth are set on  
edge.”

But God came back against this with a powerful declaration: “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (v. 4). And then the rest of the chapter (vv. 5–32) enlarges on this principle and applies it in detail. God is a just God.

### B. Aliens, Orphans, and Widows: vv. 17–18

“Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge” (v. 17). In ancient society, as often in modern India, widows were left with no rights and no proper way of taking care of their needs. But God is “a father to the fatherless” and “a defender of widows” (Ps. 68:5).

The Israelites were to remember that they had suffered as slaves in Egypt (v. 18). Therefore they were to be kind to those in need.

## VI. GENEROSITY TO THE NEEDY: Deuteronomy 24:19–22

### A. Sheaves in the Field: v. 19

“When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the works of your hands.”

The Book of Ruth gives a beautiful illustration of this command, which some, at least, were still following in the period of the judges in Israel. Ruth the Moabitess (an alien) had just come with Naomi, her mother-in-law, to Bethlehem. Ruth was also a "widow," and may even have been "fatherless."

Ruth said, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor" (Ruth 2:2). Fortunately, she "happened" (in God's good plan) to go to the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi's deceased husband and sons. The final outcome we all know: Boaz married Ruth, who became the ancestress of David, and so of Jesus.

### **B. Fruit on the Trees: vv. 20-22**

"When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches

a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow" (v. 20). The same thing was to be done when gathering grapes in the fall (v. 21).

Olives and grapes were the two most common fruits in Palestine. One can still see hillsides almost everywhere—as around Jerusalem and Bethlehem—covered with olive trees. And they still beat the ripe olives off the trees with long sticks. Also one can see almost endless acres covered with vineyards. Thus these two regulations fit into the pattern of the country.

The Israelites were to remember that they had suffered hunger and privation as slaves in Egypt. That is why God was commanding them to be thoughtful of others and generous to the poor and needy (v. 22).

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## **CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

Today's lesson tells us that we should be kind to the poor and needy. In our country, and many countries of Europe, the government provides welfare for those in need of it. So what is there left for us to do?

There are still millions of people in the world who go hungry every day. We can give of our means to help meet the

need of some of these through reputable organizations.

But there is something else we can all do, and that is to be kind and gracious to poor people, and help them to realize that God loves them. This must be proved to them by a real spirit of love on our part.



August 9, 1981

## THE BASIS OF COVENANT RENEWAL

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

II Samuel 7:18-22

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *The Basis of Covenant Renewal*

**Youth Topic:** *Committed Living*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 29:1-15

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 29:2-15

**Memory Verse:** *The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* Deuteronomy 33:27

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *God Chooses Us*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 7:6-11; 30:11-20

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 7:6-11

**Memory Verse:** *The LORD your God has chosen you for his own possession.* Deuteronomy 7:6

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Aug. 3 M.:** The Covenant with Abraham. Gen. 17:1-8

**Aug. 4 T.:** Covenants and Holiness. Exod. 19:1-6

**Aug. 5 W.:** Conditions of Covenants. Exod. 19:7-14

**Aug. 6 T.:** The Ten Commandments. Exod. 20:1-8, 12-17

**Aug. 7 F.:** The Covenant at Shechem. Josh. 24:1-3, 14-15

**Aug. 8 S.:** The Covenant at Moab. Deut. 29:1-15

**Aug. 9 S.:** The New Covenant. Jer. 31:31-37

LESSON AIM

To help us see the importance of each new generation renewing the covenant with God.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 1400 B.C.

**Place:** Moab

LESSON OUTLINE

### The Basis of Covenant Renewal

**I. The Renewed Covenant in Moab:** Deuteronomy 29:1

**II. The Israelites in Egypt and the Desert:** Deuteronomy 29:2-6

**A. The Plagues in Egypt:** vv. 2-3

**B. Spiritual Dullness of the Israelites:** v. 4

C. Provision of Clothing: v. 5

D. Provision of Food: v. 6

**III. Conquests East of the Jordan:** Deuteronomy 29:7-8

A. Defeat of Sihon and Og: v. 7

B. Inheritance of Two and a Half Tribes: v. 8

**IV. Renewal of the Covenant:** Deuteronomy 29:9-15

A. Basis of Prosperity: v. 9

B. In the Presence of the Lord: vv. 10-11

C. Entering into a Covenant: v. 12

D. To Be God's People: v. 13

E. A Permanent Covenant: vv. 14-15

The last four lessons of this quarter constitute "Unit III: Covenant Renewal." It will be remembered that the Book of Deuteronomy consists of three great discourses of Moses. The first was a review of history (cc. 1-4). The second was the regiving of the law (cc. 5-28). The third (this unit) was the renewal of the covenant (cc. 29-33). The last chapter (34) is a sort of epilogue, describing the death of Moses.

Last week's lesson ended with chapter 24, and today's lesson is based on the first part of chapter 29. Chapters 27 and 28 describe the curses and blessings that would come from God. Six tribes were to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people and six on Mount Ebal to pronounce the curses (27:12-13). The curses begin with a reference to certain of the Ten Commandments (vv. 15-16). Then they go into more detailed matters (vv. 17-19). Four of them deal with sexual immorality (vv. 20-23). The last curse is general, against disobedience (v. 26).

If the Israelites obeyed God's commands, great blessings would follow (28:1-14). Again there is a long section of warnings of the curses that will inevitably come as the result of disobedience (28:15-68).

The only way to happy, successful living is to have committed living. When our lives are fully consecrated to God, and we live out that commitment day by day, we experience His blessings.

There must be a definite time when we make our covenant with God, to belong to Him and to obey Him. The earlier this is done the better, so that we do not waste our lives in selfish, sinful living.

If we sense that we have failed to keep our covenant fully, then we should renew the covenant at once. Obedience is the price of blessing and happiness.

1. God chooses us, and we must choose Him.
2. God's love for us never changes.
3. We should make our love for Him strong and steady.
4. Obedience is the proof of our love.

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE RENEWED COVENANT IN MOAB:

Deuteronomy 29:1

"These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb." As we have noted, "Horeb" is another name for Mount Sinai.

It was forty years before this that God had made His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. The generation that saw and heard what happened there had all perished in the thirty-eight years of wandering in the desert after the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea. Only Joshua and Caleb were left of the men who were over twenty years of age at that time.

Now, through Moses (as at Sinai), God is renewing this basic covenant with the new generation that had been born in the desert. It was very important that these people know God's law before entering Canaan. So in Moab, east of the Jordan, the covenant was renewed.

### II. THE ISRAELITES IN EGYPT AND THE DESERT:

Deuteronomy 29:2-6

#### A. The Plagues in Egypt: vv. 2-3

Moses summoned all the Israelites before him and said to them: "Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders."

The reference, of course, is to the ten plagues in Egypt. Moses had carried God's message to Pharaoh: "Let my people go" (Exod. 7:16). Pharaoh refused: Then the Lord instructed Moses to tell Aaron: "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs."

The result: "Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars" (7:19). That was the first plague.

The second was the plague of frogs (Exod. 8:1-15). God warned Pharaoh through Moses: "The Nile will teem with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and into your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs" (v. 3). And so it happened.

The third plague was that of gnats (Exod. 8:16-19). "When Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats" (v. 17). The people felt eaten up!

The fourth plague was flies (Exod. 8:20-31). This time, and from now on, God exempted the Israelites from suffering by the plagues poured into Pharaoh's palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies (v. 24).

Then came the fifth, the plague on livestock (Exod. 9:1-7). Once more the Lord told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Let my people go" (v. 1). If he refused, "the hand of the LORD will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field—on your horses and donkeys and camels and on your cattle and sheep and goats" (v. 3). The result? "All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died" (v. 6). Surely this was a "miraculous sign" and a "great wonder." Pharaoh investigated and found that none of the animals of the Israelites had died. "Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go" (v. 7).

The sixth plague was that of boils (9:8-12). The Lord instructed Moses and Aaron: "Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over the whole land of

Egypt, and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land" (vv. 8-9). This, too, came to pass.

The seventh judgment was the plague of hail (Exod. 9:13-35). In obedience to God's order, Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky. "The LORD sent thunder and hail and lightning flashed down to the ground . . . hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Throughout Egypt hail struck everywhere in the fields—both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were" (vv. 23-26). The land of Egypt was being ruined!

The eighth plague was that of locusts (Exod. 10:1-20). Once more came the divine command to Pharaoh: "Let my people go" (v. 3). This time Pharaoh's officials begged him to give in. "Do you not realize that Egypt is ruined?" (v. 7). Pharaoh tried an unworkable compromise—only the men would go (vv. 8-11). Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, "and the LORD made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts . . . Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. They covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the hail. . . . Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt" (vv. 13-15). It was catastrophe.

The ninth plague was darkness (Exod. 10:21-29). Again Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, "and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the place where they lived" (vv. 22-23). This time Pharaoh offered another compromise: The men could go, but not the flocks and herds (v. 24). This way the people would still be sure to come back. But Moses' famous answer was:

"Not a hoof is to be left behind" (v. 26). Thoroughly angered, Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again!" (v. 28). And so it was.

The tenth plague was the worst of all. The Lord said to Moses: "About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well" (Exod. 11:4-5). At midnight it happened (v. 29). Now Pharaoh said, "Go" (vv. 31-32).

## B. Spiritual Dullness of the Israelites: v. 4

In spite of the fact that these Israelites had heard their parents tell all about the miraculous happenings in Egypt, they were still dull in their spiritual comprehension. Moses declared "But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear." Was God to blame?

Adam Clarke comments: "Some critics read this verse interrogatively . . . because they suppose that God could not reprehend them for the non-performance of a duty, when He had neither given them a mind to perceive the obligation of it nor strength to perform it. Though this is strictly just, yet there is no need for the interrogation, as the words only imply that they had not such a heart, not because God had not given them all the means of knowledge, and helps of His grace and Spirit, which were faithful use of their advantages, and therefore they had not that wise, loving, and obedient heart which they might otherwise have had" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, pp. 225-26).

## C. Provision of Clothing: v. 5

"During the forty years that I led you through the desert, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on



your feet." We find this stated also in 8:4. Adam Clarke interprets that verse as meaning: "God so amply provided for them all the necessaries of life that they never were obligated to wear tattered garments, nor were their feet injured for lack of shoes or sandals" (*Commentary*, p. 211).

#### D. Provision of Food: v. 6

"You ate no bread and drank no wine or other fermented drink." Adam Clarke writes: "That is, you have not been supported in an ordinary providential way; I have been continually working miracles for you, 'that ye might know that I am the Lord.' Thus we find that God had furnished them with all the means of this knowledge, and that the means were ineffectual, not because they were not properly calculated to answer God's gracious purpose, but because the people were not workers with God; consequently they received the grace of God in vain" (*Commentary*, p. 226). (See 5:29.)

### III. CONQUESTS EAST OF THE JORDAN: Deuteronomy 29:7-8

#### A. Defeat of Sihon and Og: v. 7

The defeat of Sihon, king of Heshbon, is described in 2:26-37. Moses

had sent messengers offering peace and saying, "Let us pass through your country. We will stay on the main road; we will not turn aside to the right or to the left. Sell us food to eat and water to drink for their price in silver" (vv. 27-28). What more could any king expect than this? But Sihon refused.

The result was that when Sihon came out to fight against Israel, he was defeated and all his towns were taken. The Israelites destroyed all the inhabitants (v. 34), but they saved the livestock and goods for themselves (v. 35).

As the Israelites moved north to the Sea of Galilee, "Og king of Bashan with his whole army marched out to meet us in battle at Edrei" (3:1). The Lord assured Moses that He would also give the Israelites this territory (v. 2).

And so it happened. No survivors were left (v. 3), and all the cities were taken—sixty in all (v. 4)—though they were "fortified with high walls and with gates and bars" (v. 5). Once again the Israelites took the livestock and plunder (v. 7).

#### B. Inheritance of the Two and a Half Tribes: v. 8

"We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh." Reuben took the southern part of what had been captured from Sihon, on the east side of the Dead Sea. The tribe of Gad settled down in the northern part of Sihon's former territory, on the east side of the Jordan River between the Dead Sea on the south and the Sea of Galilee on the north. The half-tribe of Manasseh occupied Bashan which was east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee.

It will always be a moot question as to whether these two and a half tribes were wise to settle down on the east side of the Jordan, rather than in Canaan. When the Assyrians were extending their empire, they conquered this eastern region before moving into the Promised Land and taking Samaria in 722 B.C. So those outside Canaan were captured first.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When do we need to renew our covenant with God?
2. How can we avoid breaking the covenant?
3. What produces spiritual dullness?
4. How does God provide for our physical needs?
5. How can we be sure of spiritual prosperity?
6. What does it mean to be in the presence of the Lord?

#### IV. RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT:

Deuteronomy 29:9-15

##### A. Basis of Prosperity: v. 9

"Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do." In Deuteronomy, over and over again, obedience is presented as the price of prosperity. This is not an arbitrary matter. If we obey God, we walk in a way that is sure to be prosperous. That is, we learn to live in such a way that things go right. As we carefully follow the path marked out in God's covenant with us, we find that God's way is truly the best way.

##### B. In the Presence of the Lord: vv. 10-11

"All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God—your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water."

Adam Clarke comments: "They were about to enter into a covenant with God; and as a covenant implies two parties contracting, God is represented as being present, and they and all their families, old and young, come before Him" (*Commentary*, p. 226).

It is a solemn thing to stand in God's presence. We should realize this especially as we come to worship together, for He has promised to be where two or three are gathered together in His name. In His presence there is no place for any insincerity or indifference. We must have a reverent attitude. And especially is there no place for dishon-

esty. We have to be transparently pure in God's presence.

##### C. Entering into a Covenant: v. 12

"You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath."

As we have noted before, God sets all the terms of the covenant; it is a unilateral agreement. But we must accept those terms, and then we "enter into" the covenant. Its gracious provisions are ours to enjoy. And God is under oath to fulfill all that He has promised in the covenant.

##### D. To Be God's People: v. 13

"To confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." It is only by the divine covenant that the Israelites were the people of God, and it is only by His covenant with us through Jesus Christ that we are His people.

##### E. A Permanent Covenant: vv. 14-15

"I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God but also with those who are not here today." The covenant was not only with that generation of Israelites but with future generations as well.

So it is with the new covenant in Christ. It extends to all who will accept, right up to the time of the second coming.

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### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

God had made at Sinai a covenant with those He had brought out of Egypt, but they rebelled and perished in the desert. Now it was necessary to renew this covenant with a new generation.

Whenever we realize that we have

broken our covenant with God, through disobedience, we should come back to Him and renew our covenant with Him. We should not break our covenant, but it is better to renew it a number of times than to let it remain broken.

August 16, 1981

## REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

I Kings 3:5-14

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Repentance and Restoration*

**Youth Topic:** *God's Compassionate Love*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 29:16-28; 30:1-10

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 30:1-10

**Memory Verse:** *Obey the voice of the LORD, and keep all his commandments which I command you this day.* Deuteronomy 30:8

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Hearing God's Commands*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1; II Kings 23:1-3

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 10:12-13; II Kings 23:1-3

**Memory Verse:** *Love the LORD your God and keep his commandments.* Deuteronomy 11:1

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Aug. 10 M.:** The Results of Breaking Covenants. Deut. 29:16-28

**Aug. 11 T.:** Restoration After Repentance. Deut. 30:1-10

**Aug. 12 W.:** Repentance in Josiah's Time. II Kings 23:1-5

**Aug. 13 T.:** "Return to the LORD." Joel 2:10-14

**Aug. 14 F.:** "Pardon My Guilt." Ps. 25:8-21

**Aug. 15 S.:** "Why Will You Die...?" Ezek. 33:10-16

**Aug. 16 S.:** Welcome for the Prodigal. Luke 15:11-24

LESSON AIM

To help us see God's love and mercy in giving restoration in response to repentance.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 1400 B.C.

**Place:** Moab, east of the Jordan River

LESSON OUTLINE

### Repentance and Restoration

#### I. Abhorrence of Idolatry: Deuteronomy 29:16-18

A. Observation: vv. 16-17

B. Avoidance: v. 18

#### II. Curse on Wilful Disobedience: Deuteronomy 29:19-21

A. Cynical Rebellion: v. 19

B. Divine Wrath: v. 20

C. Singled Out for Disaster: v. 21

- III. Destruction of the Land:** Deuteronomy 29:22-24  
 A. Calamity and Disease: v. 22  
 B. A Burning Waste: v. 23  
 C. Shocked Reaction: v. 24
- IV. Reason for Divine Wrath:** Deuteronomy 29:25-28  
 A. Covenant Abandoned: v. 25  
 B. Idolatry: v. 26  
 C. Drastic Punishment: vv. 27-28
- V. Prosperity After Repentance:** Deuteronomy 30:1-10  
 A. Sincere Repentance: vv. 1-2  
 B. Return to the Land: vv. 3-5  
 C. Circumcision of the Heart: v. 6  
 D. Curses on the Enemy: v. 7  
 E. Renewed Obedience: v. 8  
 F. Material Prosperity: v. 9  
 G. Obedience and Loyalty: v. 10

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

The recurring theme of Deuteronomy is that obedience brings blessing and disobedience brings destruction. No one can go through this book without feeling the mighty impact of these twin truths.

But suppose a person has disobeyed and then wants to escape the consequent destruction. What can he do? He must repent of what he has done and turn to the Lord with all his heart. Genuine repentance brings restoration.

These truths are illustrated over and over again in the pages of the Old Testament. Frequently the Israelites disobeyed the law of God and turned away from Him. But whenever they turned back to Him in true repentance, He always forgave them and restored them to their land. The longsuffering of God is demonstrated many times in the Old Testament.

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

Our topic today is God's compassionate love. That love was shown in delivering the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. It was shown in bringing them into the Promised Land, in spite of repeated disobedience. It is shown in the Book of Judges in forgiving the rebellious people when they repented. Almost every book of the Old Testament has examples of God's compassionate love.

But such examples are all around us today, too. Many wicked sinners have been wonderfully saved and blessed.

How much better it is to commit our lives to God when we are young and to keep true to Him and enjoy His continuous blessing in our lives.

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. It is a sad day when people lose sight of the Scriptures.
2. It is a glad day when they rediscover God's Word.
3. Since we have the Bible available, let's read it and obey its teachings.
4. To love God means that we obey His laws.



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. ABHORRENCE OF IDOLATRY: Deuteronomy 29:16-18

#### A. Observation: vv. 16-17

"You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries on the way here" (v. 16).

Not all would remember the life in Egypt, but probably most of the young people would have been told about it. It was now forty years since they left that land.

But most of them could recall the countries they had passed through on the way. Since most of the forty years had been spent in the desert, it was mainly in the most recent years that they had gone through these countries.

Verse 17 says: "You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold." The Hebrew word for "detestable images" is a strong term, traditionally translated "abominations" (KJV, NASB). The Greek word used here in the Septuagint means "detestable things." It expresses God's utter abhorrence of idolatry.

#### B. Avoidance: v. 18

"Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison."

The Epistle to the Hebrews has a couple of references that may be related to what we have here. In Hebrews 3:12 we read, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." And Hebrews 12:15 warns us, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

We need to ask God to cleanse our hearts from any sin or bitterness that will cause trouble and hinder others from following the Lord. Bitter

thoughts can lead to unkind words or bad attitudes.

### II. CURSE ON WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE: Deuteronomy 29:19-21

#### A. Cynical Rebellion: v. 19

"When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, 'I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way.' This will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry."

The New American Standard Bible reads: "And it shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry.'"

When these translations are compared with the King James Version, we can see that the meaning of the last clause is not clear. A footnote in the New International Version offers an alternative translation similar to the King James Version.

This illustrates that sometimes we cannot be certain of what the Hebrew text means. In such cases the best we can do is to put one rendering in the text and another in the margin.

In any case, this verse clearly describes cynical rebellion against God's will. The person wants to have his own way, and thinks he will get by!

#### B. Divine Wrath: v. 20

Such an attitude inevitably brings God's wrath. A holy God hates sin and cannot condone it. He has compassion on those who are weak and often fail, provided the basic attitude of their heart is to do God's will. But those who are self-willed and rebellious cannot be helped.

A good example is the contrast between Saul and David. The former became stubborn and determined to have his own way. God finally had to cut him off.

David had some pitiful failures in his life that showed points of weakness in his character. But because he wanted to obey the Lord, and because he repented sincerely when he failed, God was able to bless him and honor him greatly.

### C. Singled Out for Disaster: v. 21

"The LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster, according to all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law."

If a person became a stiff-necked rebel God would make an example of him, to deter others from going the same way. The price of rebellion is a bitter one to pay.

## III. DESTRUCTION OF THE LAND:

Deuteronomy 29:22-24

### A. Calamity and Disease: v. 22

The destruction of the land because of the sins of the Israelites would be a spectacle for all to see. This, again, would be a warning to others not to flout God's laws and take one's own stubborn way.

### B. A Burning Waste: v. 23

"The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulphur—nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger."

Here we have a very bleak picture. The description has not been literally fulfilled for the Promised Land, though there were many times when drought and famine came because of the people's sins. Parts of the land, it is true, have become like the description here.

### C. Shocked Reaction: v. 24

"All the nations will ask: 'Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?'"

Israel was intended to be a shining

revelation to all nations of the blessings that God brings on His people. Instead they too often became examples of the curse that comes from disobedience and rebellion.

## IV. REASON FOR DIVINE

### WRATH:

Deuteronomy 29:25-28

### A. Covenant Abandoned: v. 25

"And the answer will be: 'It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD... the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt.'" Egypt was one of the greatest nations in the world. So people everywhere knew what had happened. How could Israel forget God's covenant?

### B. Idolatry: v. 26

The inexcusable sin mentioned here was idolatry. In spite of the fact that the God of their fathers had miraculously delivered them from Egypt and showed His power over pagan deities, the people "went off and worshiped other gods."

### C. Drastic Punishment: vv. 27-28

Because of their idolatry, the Lord would bring on the land all the curses written in this book. The Lord would uproot them from their land and send them into captivity.

And that is what happened in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Disobedience brought disaster. God's warnings went unheeded, and so were fulfilled.

## V. PROSPERITY AFTER REPENTANCE:

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

### A. Sincere Repentance: vv. 1-2

"When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you

among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today. . . .”

This language describes a need for sincere repentance. The first step is taking to heart what has happened—remembering God’s blessings when they formerly obeyed His commands, and accepting the severe punishment that came when they rebelled and disobeyed.

The second step is returning to the Lord. When people have gone away from God, they get no help until they turn around and go back to Him. Like the father of the prodigal son, God is always waiting for His wayward children to return.

The third step is obeying God’s commands “with all your heart and with all your soul.” If the repentance is to be genuine, it cannot be halfhearted.

### B. Return to the Land: vv. 3-5

“Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes [or, “will bring you back from captivity” (footnote)] and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you” (v.3). Of the two alternative translations indicated above, there is no way of knowing which is better. But the end result is the same in both cases.

Moses goes on to say: “Even if you

have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back” (v. 4). If this language is to be taken literally, it has to refer to something more than the Babylonian (or Assyrian) captivity. It would seem that the only possible reference is to the scattering of the Jews throughout the world following the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the return of Jews to Palestine in our own generation.

“He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers” (v. 5). It may well be questioned whether the last part of this verse has yet been fulfilled, but we believe it will be. God always keeps His promises.

### C. Circumcision of the Heart: v. 6

“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”

This wonderful promise can be fulfilled only as the Jews accept Jesus as their Messiah, which they will do at His second coming. For circumcision of the heart is a spiritual experience. Paul writes: “Circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (Rom. 2:29). He also wrote to the Colossians, speaking of Christ: “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ” (Col. 2:11). So the circumcision of the heart is the cleansing of our heart from the sinful nature by the blood of Christ (I John 1:7; in the NIV “every sin” has now been officially changed to “all sin”).

### D. Curses on the Enemy: v. 7

“The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What in our lives may be detestable to God?
2. What are some cynical attitudes that people take toward God?
3. What is meant by the wrath of God?
4. How does God show His compassionate love?
5. What does repentance mean?
6. How can we maintain our warm loyalty to God?



and persecute you." This happened in at least a measure to the Assyrians and Babylonians, as well as to lesser nations that persecuted Israel.

#### **E. Renewed Obedience: v. 8**

"You will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today."

This happened to some extent after the return from Babylonian captivity. The terrible besetting sin of idolatry, mentioned so frequently in Deuteronomy, was forever purged from Israel. Outwardly the Jews were following the law of Moses rather well in Jesus' day. But, again, the complete fulfillment awaits the coming messianic kingdom.

#### **F. Material Prosperity: v. 9**

"Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers."

As we have noted before, a large family was considered by the ancients to be a special blessing from the Lord. This was one way that women wanted to be fruitful. And material prosperity was also seen as a sign of God's blessing. In our Christian age we should put more emphasis on spiritual prosperity.

#### **G. Obedience and Loyalty: v. 10**

What was the condition of their receiving all these blessings? This verse gives the answer: "If you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." The combination of these last two phrases has occurred several times in Deuteronomy. The only secret of safety spiritually is for us to put our whole heart and soul into loving God and living for Him. This means continuous obedience. It means that we must read His Word every day and do it prayerfully. We should ask the Holy Spirit to impress upon us, as we read, what He wants us to notice—then interpret it for us and apply it to us.

## **CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION**

Our country needs to repent! Certainly no Bible-believing Christian would question that. Americans are breaking the Ten Commandments in a colossal way.

We can thank God that the call to

repentance is being sounded more and more in our day. But we must pray that people will listen to that call and then act. Repenting is not pleasant business. But it is inescapable if we are going to have God's blessing on us as a nation.



August 23, 1981

## CHOICE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

Nehemiah 9:26-31

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *Choice and Its Consequences*

**Youth Topic:** *Choose Wisely*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 30:11-20

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 30:11-20

**Memory Verse:** *I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life.* Deuteronomy 30:19

CHILDREN

**Topic:** *Praising God*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 12:5-12; 14:22-23; 32:1-12

**Scripture Lesson:** 12:1-12; 14:22-23

**Memory Verse:** *It is good to give thanks to the LORD.* Psalm 92:1

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Aug. 17 M.:** The Religious Union of the Twelve. Josh. 24:1-7

**Aug. 18 T.:** Israel Possesses the Promised Land. Josh. 24:8-13

**Aug. 19 W.:** Choose Life or Death. Josh. 24:14-18

**Aug. 20 T.:** Witness Your Own Choice. Josh. 24:20-25

**Aug. 21 F.:** Here I Raise My Ebenezer. Josh. 24:25-31

**Aug. 22 S.:** Choose to Delight in the Law. Ps. 1

**Aug. 23 S.:** Pray for an Understanding Mind. I Kings 3:5-14

LESSON AIM

To enforce the fact that all choices have their consequences.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 1400 B.C.

**Place:** Moab, east of the Jordan River

LESSON OUTLINE

**Choice and Its Consequences**

**I. Nearness of the Word of God:** Deuteronomy 30:11-14

A. Not Beyond Reach: v. 11

B. Not in Heaven: v. 12

C. Not Beyond the Sea: v. 13

D. Very Near You: v. 14

- II. **Responsibility of Choice:** Deuteronomy 30:15-16
  - A. Prosperity or Destruction: v. 15
  - B. Obedience and Blessing: v. 16
- III. **Results of Disobedience:** Deuteronomy 30:17-18
  - A. Turning to Idols: v. 17
  - B. Destruction as Consequence: v. 18
- IV. **Two Choices:** Deuteronomy 30:19-20
  - A. Life and Death: v. 19a
  - B. Choose Life: vv. 19b-20a
  - C. Consequences of Choice: v. 20b
- V. **Joshua as Moses' Successor:** Deuteronomy 31:1-8
  - A. Moses Forbidden to Cross the Jordan: vv. 1-2
  - B. A New Leader: v. 3
  - C. Promise of Successful Conquest: vv. 4-6
  - D. Encouraging Joshua: vv. 7-8

Throughout the Book of Deuteronomy we find frequent predictions of the future apostasy and idolatry of Israel. One of those is found in 31:16-18. The Lord said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them" (v. 16). The Lord went on to say that as a result, "Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, 'Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?'" (v. 17).

In our devotional reading for today, Nehemiah 9:26-31, we find a confirmation of this prediction. The Israelites who had returned from the Babylonian captivity gathered for a day of fasting and confessing their sins (v. 1). They confessed that their forefathers "were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs" (v. 26). The result was defeat and oppression (v. 27). Again and again they had sinned (v. 28). In spite of warning, "they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands" (v. 29). Yet God was gracious and merciful.

There is a whole lifetime wrapped up in the words *choose wisely*.

And these two words also suggest two of the most important facts that young people need to face realistically. The first is: We all have to make choices every day. There is no escaping this. We are free to choose, within certain limits. But we are not free to decide not to choose! If we say that we will do or say nothing, that is still a choice.

Since that is true, the second fact is of crucial importance. It is this: Every choice has its consequences. And we cannot escape those consequences.

The choices of college, career, companion—all of these are fraught with lifelong consequences. So choose wisely!

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS

SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH

CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN

1. Israel was to give thanks for God's help.
2. We should do the same.
3. Praising God brings joy and gladness.
4. Sunday worship should be a joyful experience.

## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. NEARNESS OF THE WORD OF GOD:

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

#### A. Not Beyond Reach: v. 11

"Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach." In the King James Version the word "hidden" translates the Hebrew word *niphleth*, which suggests it is not too "wonderful" or "difficult" to understand and perform. Also God's command was not "far off" or "beyond your reach."

If that was true then, how much more it is true today! We have ample instruction, week after week, on the meaning of God's Word. In most cases, we get this in Sunday school and in church services. And we have available thousands of good books explaining the Bible. In the last thirty-five years there has been a proliferation of Bible study books and commentaries written by evangelicals. We are well supplied!

#### B. Not in Heaven: v. 12

"It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it.'" We do not have to ask for an angel to come and tell us what God wants us to do. He has already told us, and it is written down for us to study and obey.

#### C. Not Beyond the Sea: v. 13

"Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it.'"

There was a time when the bulk of the world's population would have had to cross the sea to find God's Word and get someone who could proclaim it. But that is no longer true. Missionaries have proclaimed God's Word in almost all countries. And even people who have never seen a missionary or attended a church can hear the Bible read and expounded over the radio.

#### D. Very Near You: v. 14

"No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."

As we have hinted earlier, these words are especially applicable to us who are Christians today. When Moses said this to the Israelites, none of them had a "Bible" in his possession. From time to time the words of the law that God gave at Mount Sinai were read to the people in public gatherings (cf. 5:1). But nobody could sit down at home with God's Word and study it by the hour.

What a contrast today! Most of our Christian homes have many Bibles in them. We can pick one up any time we want to and read it. We also have the Holy Spirit in our hearts to help us understand it as we read it, and we should always ask Him to do so. Truly the word is very near to us.

It is interesting to see how Paul interprets verses 12-14 in Romans 10:6-10. He first notes that "the righteousness that is by the law" is described by Moses this way: "The man who does these things will live by them" (v. 5). This is the righteousness of obedience.

Then Paul declares: "But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into

heaven?" (—that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the deep?"' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Paul found an anticipation of the gospel in the words of Moses here.

## II. RESPONSIBILITY OF CHOICE: Deuteronomy 30:15-16

### A. Prosperity or Destruction: v. 15

"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction." These are the two alternatives between which we must choose. If we obey, we receive life and prosperity. If we disobey, we receive death and destruction. No one else can make the choice, for God has created us as free moral beings. But we must realize that having chosen, we cannot change the consequences of that choice.

### B. Obedience and Blessing: v. 16

"For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess."

Commitment to God is more than the initial choice. It is constant obedience to the will of God. We must not only obey the command to repent and believe, but love the Lord every day, walk in His ways and keep His commands that He has given us in His Word. Through the help of the Holy Spirit this is not too difficult, not out of our reach.

## III. RESULTS OF DISOBEDIENCE: Deuteronomy 30:17-18

### A. Turning to Idols: v. 17

"But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them. . . ."

Unfortunately, this is what happened over and over again in the later history of Israel. During the period of the judges and also in the kingdom period, the nation went into idolatry repeatedly, bringing down God's punishment for its sins.

### B. Destruction as Consequence: v. 18

If they turned to idolatry, here is what would happen: "I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess."

Not all the people would be destroyed. But as the result of periodic, prevalent idolatry the nation *was* destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians. From then until 1948, when the State of Israel was set up, the Jews have not had a national government, except for the partial Maccabean independence of 143-63 B.C.

## IV. TWO CHOICES: Deuteronomy 30:19-20

### A. Life and Death: v. 19a

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses."

Adam Clarke makes this astute observation: "Were there no such thing as *free will* in man, who could reconcile these sayings with either sincerity or common sense? God has made the human will free, and there is no power or influence either in heaven, earth, or hell, except the power of God, that can



deprive it of its free volitions; of its power to will and nill, to choose and refuse, to act or not to act or force it to sin against God. Hence man is accountable for his actions, because they are his; were he necessitated by fate, or sovereign constraint, they could not be his" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 227).

### B. Choose Life: vv. 19b-20a

"Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him."

Moses not only warned (vv. 17-18), but he pleaded. He loved his people and wanted them to have God's blessing. But he could not compel them to make the right choice; no one could, not even God.

Why choose life? "So that you and your children may live." Probably all of us have known people who were brought up in a Christian home, but rebelled against God and their parents' religion. The result was not only that they forfeited eternal life but that *their* children failed to "live" spiritually because of their influence. So they not only lost their own souls eternally but were responsible for their children being lost.

"That you may love the LORD your God" (v. 20a). Adam Clarke comments: "Without love there can be no obedience." On the next clause, "listen to his voice," he says, "Without obedience love is fruitless and dead." And on the

last clause, "hold fast to him," he observes: "Without close attachment and perseverance, temporary love, however sincere and fervent... will ultimately be ineffectual. He alone who 'endureth to the end shall be saved'" (*Commentary*, p. 227).

### C. Consequences of Choice: v. 20b

"For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." The Israelites did have many years—over a thousand—in the land. But they would have had many more than that if they had faithfully loved the Lord and obeyed Him.

## V. JOSHUA AS MOSES' SUCCESSOR: Deuteronomy 31:1-8

### A. Moses Forbidden to Cross the Jordan: vv. 1-2

Moses went out and told all Israel: "I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you." At last he had come to recognize this unpleasant truth! He then added what the Lord had told him: "You shall not cross the Jordan."

As we have previously noted, this was a bitter pill for Moses to swallow. The historical account of how this happened is recorded in Numbers 20:7-12. Moses had previously struck the rock, in obedience to God's command, and water had gushed out (Exod. 17:6). But the second time he was told to "speak" to the rock (Num. 20:8). Exasperated with the grumbling Israelites, Moses said to the assembled congregation, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (v. 10). Then he raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff (v. 11). Because he disobeyed, God told him, "You will not bring this community into the land I give them" (v. 12).

Why was the rock not to be struck the second time? In I Corinthians 10:4 Paul says that the Israelites in the desert "drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do we need to treasure God's Word in our hearts?
2. What is the value of Bible memorization?
3. What will help us obey God's Word?
4. Why is obedience so important?
5. What are the benefits of obedience?
6. What can we learn from the lives of Moses and Joshua?

Christ." The physical rock from which the water flowed was a type of Christ, who gives living water (John 4:10). To provide us with that water of life Christ was smitten on the cross at His first coming. However, the second time He will not be crucified but crowned. Moses, by disobeying, was breaking the typology. Of course he was not aware of all this, but his duty was to obey God's command each time. It was because he disobeyed that he was punished.

We have already seen how Moses pleaded with the Lord to be allowed to enter Canaan, but the Lord told him no (Deut. 3:23-26).

### B. A New Leader: v. 3

Moses now said to the Israelites: "The LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the LORD said."

The Lord Himself was to be their invisible, invincible leader, going ahead of them into battle. But Joshua was to be their visible, human leader. He was well qualified for the task, as he had already led the army of Israel to victory against the Amalekites.

### C. Promise of Successful Conquest: vv. 4-6

The Lord promised to do to the Canaanites what He had done to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites

(v. 4). The Lord would deliver the nations of Canaan into the hands of Israel for destruction (v. 5). So the Lord said: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (v. 6).

### D. Encouraging Joshua: vv. 7-8

Wisely, Moses gave Joshua a sort of public inauguration into his new position, even though the reins of leadership were not yet turned fully over to him. The old leader called for Joshua to stand with Him before all Israel.

Then he said to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their forefathers to give them; and you must divide it among them as their inheritance" (v. 17). So Joshua's task was twofold: to conquer Canaan and then to divide the Promised Land among the tribes as their permanent inheritance.

And that is what we find in the Book of Joshua. It divides into two equal parts: (1) the conquest of Canaan (cc. 1-12); (2) the allotment of the land (cc. 13-24).

Moses concluded with essentially the same admonition and encouragement he had just given to all Israel: "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (v. 8). Joshua would need this advice many times in the days ahead!

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

"The word is very near you" (30:14). This statement is more true now than ever before in human history, and for that we ought to be thankful.

As a missionary was walking a lonely mountain trail, he happened to meet a national. To his great surprise the man asked, "Are you a Christian?"

When the missionary eagerly answered in the affirmative, the man inquired, "Would you like to see my

church?" He led the missionary to a little crude hut. There the national pointed to a small radio and said, "That's our church." He had no Bible, no Sunday school literature—just messages over the radio.

How thankful we ought to be that we all have the Bible in our possession, and also that the Word of God is reaching distant places by radio, as well as by the Wycliffe translators.

August 30, 1981

## GOD IS FAITHFUL

DEVOTIONAL  
READING

I Kings 19:9-18

ADULTS  
AND  
YOUTH

**Adult Topic:** *God Is Faithful*

**Youth Topic:** *Joyful Worship*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 31:30—32:14; 33:29

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 32:1-9

**Memory Verse:** *Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD. Deuteronomy 33:29*

**Topic:** *Keeping God's Law*

**Background Scripture:** Deuteronomy 5:6-12; 6:4-6; Matthew 22:34-40

CHILDREN

**Scripture Lesson:** Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Matthew 22:37-39

**Memory Verse:** *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5*

DAILY BIBLE  
READINGS

**Aug. 24 M.:** Living the Blameless Life. Ps. 119:1-8

**Aug. 25 T.:** Keeping Your Life Clean. Ps. 119:9-16

**Aug. 26 W.:** Finding Delight in God's Law. Ps. 119:17-24

**Aug. 27 T.:** Restoring One's Life. Ps. 119:25-32

**Aug. 28 F.:** Trust in the Lord. Ps. 146

**Aug. 29 S.:** Sing Praises Unto God. Ps. 119:169-176

**Aug. 30 S.:** The Steadfast Love of the Lord. Ps. 103:6-18

LESSON AIM

To help us believe that God is faithful.

LESSON SETTING

**Time:** about 1400 B.C.

**Place:** Moab, east of the Jordan River

**God Is Faithful**

**I. The Song of Moses:** Deuteronomy 31:30

**II. The Introduction:** Deuteronomy 32:1-2

A. Listen: v. 1

B. Learn: v. 2

LESSON OUTLINE

**III. The Greatness of God:** Deuteronomy 32:3-4

A. Proclaiming His Name: v. 3

B. A Faithful God: v. 4

**IV. Corruption of the People:** Deuteronomy 32:5-6

A. A Warped Generation: v. 5

B. A Foolish People: v. 6

**V. Remembering the Past:** Deuteronomy 32:7-9

A. Asking the Fathers: v. 7

B. Divinely Set Boundaries: v. 8

C. God's Inheritance: v. 9

**VI. The Beginning of Israel:** Deuteronomy 32:10-12

A. Divine Care in the Desert: v. 10

B. As a Mother Eagle: v. 11

C. Led by God Alone: v. 12

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR ADULTS**

Our lesson today is taken from the so called "Song of Moses" found in chapter 32. But we are introduced to it in the last part of chapter 31 (vv. 19-29).

The Lord said: "Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them" (v. 19). It is much easier to memorize poetry than prose, as everyone who has tried it knows. And when that poetry is set to music, it is captured more quickly and remembered much longer. That is one of the great values of hymn singing in our churches. When the old hymns and newer gospel songs get inside us they can be a great source of inspiration, of strength and comfort.

We find another song of Moses in Exodus 15, after the Israelites had been delivered at the Red Sea. It would seem that Moses was not only a prophet, but also a poet. At the Red Sea his sister Miriam led the women in singing that first song (Exod. 15:20-21). It was a day to celebrate!

**SUGGESTED  
INTRODUCTION  
FOR YOUTH**

God wants us to have joyful worship. The world has its times of happy celebration, but we have something far more wonderful to celebrate—the resurrection of Jesus as our living Lord and Savior.

Young people should join heartily in the congregational singing. We often see teenagers talking to each other or reading a Sunday school paper during the opening song service. They are missing a great blessing!

As we sing together it strengthens our sense of God's greatness and faithfulness. And in these days of popular unbelief, we need that. So let's sing our praises to God.

**CONCEPTS FOR  
CHILDREN**

1. What God wants from all of us is love and obedience.
2. He knows that is for our good.
3. Worshipping God on Sunday helps us all through the week.
4. We must love God with all our being.



## THE LESSON COMMENTARY

### I. THE SONG OF MOSES:

#### Deuteronomy 31:30

"And Moses recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel."

Regarding this beautiful song Adam Clarke observes: "On the inimitable excellence of this ode much has been written by commentators, critics, and poets; and it is allowed by the best judges to contain a specimen of almost every species of excellence in composition. . . . It is distinguished as poetry in every Hebrew Bible by being written in its own hemistichs or short half-lines, which is the general form of the Hebrew poetry; and were it translated in the same way it would be more easily understood" (*Commentary on the Bible*, one-volume edition, p. 228).

The New American Standard Bible and the New International Version do translate the song in its poetical form. As Clarke says, this adds to both the beauty and the understanding of this striking poem.

### II. THE INTRODUCTION:

#### Deuteronomy 32:1-2

##### A. Listen: v. 1

"Listen O heavens, and I will speak; Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth."

This language sounds a bit strange to us now, but it was a familiar pattern in those days. We have already seen Moses speaking this way: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day" (4:26). And Isaiah begins his prophecy by saying (1:2): "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth!"

So here Moses calls on heaven and earth to listen to what he has to say. (*Heaven* and *heavens* are used interchangeably in both the Old and New Testaments.)

Clarke comments on these words: "Let angels and men hear, and let this testimony of God be registered in both

heaven and earth. Heaven and earth are appealed to as *permanent* witnesses" (*Commentary*, p. 228).

##### B. Learn: v. 2

"Let my teaching fall like rain  
and my words descend like dew,  
like showers on new grass,  
like abundant rain on tender  
plants."

On the first line Clarke comments: "It shall come drop by drop as the shower, beginning slowly and distinctly, but increasing more and more till the plenitude of righteousness is poured down, and the whole canon of divine revelation completed."

On the second line he says: "My familiar, friendly, and affectionate speeches shall descend gently and softly, on the ear and heart, as the dew, moistening and refreshing all around" (*Commentary*, p. 228).

The Hebrew word for "showers" in the third line suggests tempestuous showers, with strong gusts of wind. Some of the strong language in this song sounds like a thunder storm of divine wrath.

"Abundant rain" (line 4) represents a Hebrew word that comes from the verb meaning to "multiply" or "increase greatly." It speaks of heavy rain watering the thirsty plants.

### III. THE GREATNESS OF GOD:

#### Deuteronomy 32:3-4

##### A. Proclaiming His Name: v. 3

"I will proclaim the name of the  
LORD.  
Oh, praise the greatness of our  
God!"

After describing how his divinely inspired teaching would come at various stages, as "rain" or "dew" or thunderous "showers" or "abundant rain," Moses appropriately cites the first and most important item in that teaching. It

is the proclamation of God's personal name Yahweh, "the LORD."

In recent years some systematic theologies have begun with man and worked up to God—or even left Him out altogether, as in the "death of God" theology of a few years ago. But all true theology begins with God. In fact, the very word *theology* is compounded of two Greek words: *theos*, "God," and *logos*, "word" or "matter." Strictly speaking, theology is a study of God. But the term is now used for the whole system of God, man, and salvation—all beginning with the Eternal One. Without Him, we wouldn't be here to study theology!

And then Moses exclaims: "Oh, praise the greatness of our God!"

How often do we do this? Probably most of us would admit that we ought to do it more frequently. We join in singing hymns of praise in church. But do we really praise Him from our hearts as we sing with our lips? Do we think carefully of the words as we sing them, and do our hearts rejoice in the greatness of our God?

But our praise should not be limited to singing in church. At home, and even at school or work, our hearts ought to be praising God for His greatness. A moment's pause to say, "Thank you, Lord; you are so great, and so good to me," can be more refreshing than a coffee break.

Many people are behind in their praying. Probably even more are behind in their praising. We owe it to our loving God to praise Him more.

#### **B. A Faithful God: v. 4**

"He is the Rock, his works are perfect,  
and all his ways are just.

A faithful God who does no wrong,  
upright and just is he."

It will be noted that the first two stanzas of this song consist of six lines each. The first two lines (one verse) are introductory to what follows, and the next four lines (vv. 2, 4) elaborate what the first two lines suggest.

The Hebrew word for "Rock" can mean "origin" or "source." Some would even translate it "Creator." As the great Creator of all life, God's works are "perfect." This refers not only to material creation, which God pronounced "good" in the first chapter of Genesis, but to all His works since that time. As the all-powerful, all-knowing God, whatever He does is done perfectly. It is man that "messes up" God's works. "All his ways are just." And we might say, "Just right!"

Moses goes on to say that the Lord is "a faithful God who does no wrong." He is the only one of whom this can be said without modification. All men have done wrong, but God never has done wrong and never will. He is the only absolutely Perfect One. "Upright and just is he." Sometimes we may be tempted to think that His dealings with men are not just. But we should take a more humble place than sitting to judge the supreme Judge of the universe. We do not know all the factors involved; only God does.

Even Job had a problem with this. In fact, the whole Book of Job may be thought of as dealing with the problem of justifying God's ways in dealing with man. Job complained. He argued and defended himself. But when God spoke "out of the storm" (Job 40:6), Job finally cried out (42:6):

"Therefore I despise myself  
and repent in dust and ashes."

And the end of the whole business was double blessing in Job's life (42:10-17).

#### **IV. CORRUPTION OF THE PEOPLE:**

**Deuteronomy 32:5-6**

#### **A. A Warped Generation: v. 5**

"They have acted corruptly toward him,  
to their shame they are no longer his children,  
but a warped and crooked generation."

What an unwelcome shift in thought! After two inspiring stanzas of poetry, we are suddenly confronted with a sad picture of the Israelites as they really were. In spite of God's marvelous love toward them, and the miraculous display of His supernatural power in delivering them from slavery, they acted corruptly toward Him. This we find frequently in the books of Exodus and Numbers. Ten times they had grumbled against God in the desert. They had refused to obey Him at Kadesh-Barnea. They had fallen into immorality with Moabite women, which also led to idolatry (Num. 25:1-3). Over and over again they had broken the Ten Commandments and disobeyed God's specific commands. Those who had done so were "no longer his children." One would have to say that the Israelites who came out of Egypt were "a warped and crooked generation."

#### B. A Foolish People: v. 6

"Is this the way you repay the Lord,  
O foolish and unwise people?

Is he not your Father, your Creator,  
who made you and formed you?"

It will never be possible to understand how the Israelites could repay God's wonderful goodness and kindness with complaint, disobedience, and deep sin. But they did. No wonder Moses

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways may Christian teaching be thought of as gentle rain, dew, tempestuous showers, or abundant rain?
2. How can we proclaim the name of the Lord?
3. Where and when should we praise the greatness of God?
4. How can we understand better God's dealings with man?
5. What is the value of recollecting the past?
6. How does God teach us to fly?

calls them "foolish and unwise people"!

He reminds them that God was their Father and Creator—individually and nationally. How could they be so ungrateful?

Yet we have known people whom the Lord wonderfully blessed and favored, who have later turned their backs on Him and gone into sin. The devil is the great deceiver and people listen to him rather than the Lord.

#### V. REMEMBERING THE PAST: Deuteronomy 32:7-9

##### A. Asking the Fathers: v. 7

"Remember the days of old;  
consider the generations long  
past.

Ask your father and he will tell you,  
your elders, and they will explain  
to you."

The first two lines seem to refer to God's wonderful dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in "the days of old." These were "the generations long past."

The last two lines seem to indicate the immediate fathers, the ones who had seen God at work in the desert. They would explain how wonderfully He had dealt with Israel.

##### B. Divinely Set Boundaries: v. 8

"When the Most High gave the  
nations their inheritance,  
when he divided all mankind,  
he set up boundaries for the peoples  
according to the number of the  
sons of Israel."

This is admittedly a hard verse to interpret. Paul perhaps had this verse in mind when he said to the court of the Areopagus in Athens: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."

Adam Clarke cites this explanation: "As Africa is called the land of Ham (Ps.



ixxviii. 51; cv. 23, 27; cvi. 22), probably that country fell to him and to his descendants, at the same time that Europe fell to Japheth, and Asia to Shem, with a particular reserve of Palestine to be the Lord's portion, for some one peculiar people" (*Commentary*, p. 228).

### C. God's Inheritance: v. 9

"For the LORD's portion is his people,  
Jacob his allotted inheritance."

Clarke appropriately writes: "What an astonishing saying! As holy souls take God for their portion, so God takes them for His portion. He represents himself as happy in His followers; and they are infinitely happy in, and satisfied with, God as their portion. This is what is implied in being a saint" (*Commentary*, p. 228).

## VI. THE BEGINNING OF ISRAEL: Deuteronomy 32:10-12

### A. Divine Care in the Desert: v. 10

"In a desert land he found him,  
in a barren and howling waste.  
He shielded him and cared for him;  
he guarded him as the apple of his eye."

The picture here is of the Lord finding the Israelites in the desert of Sinai. They were ex-slaves, just rescued from Egypt, but not yet welded together as a nation. This was accomplished at Mount Sinai, when God made a covenant with them.

Then God protected His people in many ways, from many dangers, and cared for them. He provided them with

manna and quails for food, and with water to drink in the barren desert.

The last line of this verse expresses a beautiful truth: "He guarded him as the apple of his eye." The pupil of one's eye is the most delicate part of the body. If something barely touches it, sight is gone. It is also one of the most highly valued parts of the body. We guard our eyes carefully; so God guarded Israel.

### B. As a Mother Eagle: v. 11

"Like an eagle that stirs up its nest  
and hovers over its young,  
that spreads its wings to catch them  
and carries them on its pinions."

When the eaglets reach a certain age, they should learn to fly. But they are apt to prefer the security and comfort of the large nest. So the mother eagle has to stir up the nest to get them out.

Then she hovers over them, watching carefully to take good care of them. As they venture out of the nest and flutter in fear over a seemingly bottomless height, she slides in under them, spreads her wings to catch them, and carries them on her pinions.

That is what God did for the Israelites. By the ten plagues He stirred up the nest, and they left Egypt. But they were soon fluttering helplessly. Time and again He swooped under them and carried them safely.

### C. Led by God Alone: v. 12

"The LORD alone led him;  
no foreign god was with him."

God alone rescued the Israelites and led them across the desert. No foreign god had the ability to do it. They must always remember this.

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## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Moses put his closing teaching for the Israelites in the form of a song to help them remember it.

We should have a deep appreciation for music in our churches. One of the great secrets of the success of the evan-



gical revival in the eighteenth century was the hymns of the Wesleys sung by Methodists everywhere.

I like to sit quietly in the pew during the organ prelude on Sunday morning. And I always hope the organist will play

the old familiar hymns, so that I can sing the words in my heart. I have found these moments to be among the most precious and inspiring of the whole week.

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